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RE:POSITIONING

Almost five years ago, *CineAction!* was founded by a group of friends who, sharing a common interest in film, sought to produce a journal which was held to be political insofar as it foregrounded positions (which we loosely defined as radical) held by the collective members. *CineAction!* has never pretended to be neutral in its approach to criticism. We have continually stressed our commitment to social change informed by marxist and feminist theory, and

to the women's and gay liberation movements. We purposely constituted and maintained ourselves as a collective in order to promote a sense of collaboration both in the way *CineAction!* is produced, and in the way particular issues of the magazine are conceived. What we failed to recognize in this very idealistic project was the actual degree of variation and difference within our amorphous notion of the radical. This has become further complicated by

the reality that deeply felt critical positions can not be separated easily from the individuals who hold them. The tenuousness of our original project thereby threatens to undermine our coherence from time to time. It is at these moments that we have to stop, air our differences, and hopefully continue working together. This editorial, then, is an attempt to articulate the difficulty inherent in a collective composed of people with different positions, although similar concerns. We recognize, of course and unfortunately, that there are no simple solutions.

*CineAction!*17 differs from previous issues in that there is no one dominant theme. In the first part, we have grouped together a number of responses that consist of continuations of debates involving postmodernism and canonical criticism deriving from articles published previously in *CineAction!*: Andrew Britton, replying to Janine Marchessault's article "The Critic's Choice . . ." in *CineAction!*15; Greg Rickman, writing a response to Susan Morri-

son's piece, also from *CineAction!*15; and two letters, from Scott Perna and Peter Harcourt, which refer to controversial matters raised in recent issues. Final words on each debate by the collective member concerned (Marchessault, Morrison, and Wood) are printed at the foot of the pertinent piece. In the second part, we include critical readings of Canadian films (Robin Wood on *Loyalties* and *Life Classes*), Hollywood stars (Richard Lippe on Montgomery Clift and John McCullough on Gene Kelly), contemporary Hollywood films (Ed Galafent on *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan*), and a Hollywood film from the end of the silent era (Robin Wood on Murnau's *Sunrise*).

Forthcoming issues of *CineAction!* will take as their central concern Imperialism (number 18), Authorship (number 19), and Critical Issues of the '80s (number 20). We welcome reader contributions on these themes.

Susan Morrison
Florence Jacobowitz

THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE: OR

How to Create a Socialist-Feminist Culture in one Capitalist Country Without really Trying

by Andrew Britton

"But why then do you now obliquely and insinuatingly argue against me about the 'fellow travelers?' What is going on here? At first sight it's quite incomprehensible. But the solution is a simple one: . . . my crime is that I did not bow before the manifestos of *Oktyabr* or *Kuznitsa*, that I did not acknowledge these groups as the monopolist representatives of the artistic interests of the proletariat — in short, that I did not identify the cultural-historical interests and tasks of the class with the intentions, plans and pretensions of certain literary groups. That was where I went wrong. And when this became clear, then there arose the howl, unexpected by its belatedness: Trotsky is on the side of the petty bourgeois 'fellow travelers'!"

- Leon Trotsky, "Class and Art": *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art* (Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 73)

Janine Marchessault's riposte, in the last number of *CineAction!*, to my article on postmodernism and the editorial by Robin Wood and Richard Lippe which

appeared in the same issue (*CineAction!* 13/14), both surprised and failed to surprise me. I was surprised because I had not expected to receive any response to my article at all, either favourable or unfavourable, and the prospect of a lively debate on matters of critical and theoretical principle — in a left-wing film journal! — was so astonishing, and so attractive, that I could not but feel grateful to Ms. Marchessault for taking a welcome and unlooked-for plunge. As I read, however, my surprise evaporated: it became clear rather quickly that this was not going to be a debate at all. Ms. Marchessault ends her preamble by telling us that

if the primary objective behind this issue of *CineAction!* is to express our differences in order to identify new questions, the result can only be constructively contentious.

"Can only be?" — *that* optimism, at least, has been dispelled. Naturally, I assume Ms. Marchessault believes that her intention to "express her differences" has been, in practice, successfully realised, and there is a certain sense in which this is true; but to my mind, the problem with them, as expressed, is their total lack of substance. She differs: that is more or less it. That is her privilege — but from the critical point-of-view there is certainly something seriously amiss about differences which fail to come up with either a satisfactory account of *themselves* or a reasonably veracious account of the argu-

ments which constitute them as "different." Contentiousness can only be constructive if both of the contending parties have a position and if they both agree, in the interests not simply of politeness but of mutually profitable engagement, to pay close attention to what the other party's position is. Ms. Marchessault's article falls short on both these counts: she has no position herself — beyond a feeling of intense but vague annoyance — and she can only maintain the appearance that she *does* by falsifying her opponent's. The expression of difference, in intellectual and political matters, entails responsibilities as well as privileges, and I think that if Ms. Marchessault had reminded herself of this fact before she began to write, her article would have been — different; to its great advantage as an article.

Ms. Marchessault's characteristic strategy is established by her opening gambit: rather than contesting the thesis which her colleagues actually propose, she substitutes for it a somewhat more facile thesis of her own invention and contests that instead. Richard Lippe and Robin Wood, she tells us, pose the question of cultural politics in terms of two mutually exclusive categories:

either classical Hollywood cinema and mainstream cinema which everyone has access to and which 'reflects the general movement of our culture'; *or* alternative forms of film and video 'which few have heard of, fewer have seen, and most have little chance of seeing'

No doubt Ms. Marchessault could give an account of the process by which she arrived at this reading, but anyone who takes the time to look up the editorial in question will discover at once that the reading is, in fact, false. The collaborating editors quite clearly state:

We do not in the least reject . . . the various forms of 'alternative' cinema — Third World, documentary, experimental, agitprop, locally produced and shown videos, etc. : they are necessary interventions that challenge the hegemony of a dominant practice which, by their nature, they cannot hope to displace or replace within any foreseeable future. Nor are we opposed to the inclusion in *CineAction!* of articles on such areas of filmmaking.

Surely Ms. Marchessault ought not to have had difficulty with the phrase "necessary interventions," which the writers might well have chosen (and *did*, perhaps, choose) expressly to pre-empt the charge that they subscribe to the position which Ms. Marchessault now attributes to them. What they say is that "the various forms of 'alternative' cinema are not, and have no prospect of becoming, hegemonic in the culture in which we ourselves live; that in any case they 'regard with extreme scepticism' the claim that 'mainstream cinema (the fictional narrative film, past, present and future)' has been 'effectively discredited as a mere mouthpiece for bourgeois ideology and that the only valid critical interest for radicals is in the promotion of this or that *avant-garde*'; and that socialists have the best of political reasons both for investigating the historically realised possibilities of "the fictional narrative film" and its various traditions, and for seeking to appropriate these traditions "for progressive ends" in the present. The purpose of the editorial is to adjudicate between a number of political options, and its authors state their reasons (as the critic is obliged to do) for giving political priority to the analysis of, and the planning of interventions within, the culture "which most people have access to," while acknowledging at the same time the political value and "necessity" of cultural projects of other kinds. There is no "either/or" here.

To say that Ms. Marchessault ignores, or actively falsifies,

this argument is not enough: unfortunately, there is a good deal more to complain of; for having concocted her parody of the point of view with which she disagrees, she goes on to imply that it amounts to nothing more than opportunism and bluff and to call into question the good faith and the expressed political allegiances of its advocates.

Rather strategically, Trotsky and Marx are crucial appendages to Lippe and Wood's argument: . . . Given that Trotsky was working in the wake of a successful revolution (i.e. an entirely different socio-economic context — not capitalism), as well as contending with mass illiteracy, he is not the most relevant figure to conjure up. Using Marx as a means to support an argument for classical Hollywood cinema is, surely, more than a little suspect. The fundamental absence of a theory of art in Marx's writings has, on the left, given rise to a long history of rivaling interpretations. Would that it be only as simple as: 'well, Marx liked bourgeois tradition . . .'

Trotsky, of course is *never* "the most relevant figure to conjure up" in cultivated discourse on the left (or anywhere else) in the 1980s; but even though he is so unfashionable, we are still entitled to an explanation of why the mere invocation of the historical circumstances in which he wrote should be sufficient in and of itself to dispose of his views on art. The need for such an explanation is all the more pressing in the case at hand because Ms. Marchessault goes on to make the most passionate claims for "the work of the Russian Constructivists and Formalists" which was produced (she will not need reminding) under exactly the same circumstances, but which, apparently, survives to the present day as a model and an inspiration for radicals living in "an entirely different socio-economic context" in a way that Trotsky's does not. Why should the success of the Bolshevik revolution and the illiteracy of the Russian peasantry make "Literature and Revolution," but *not* the poetry of Mayakovsky and the films of Eisenstein, "irrelevant" for the purposes of contemporary cultural theory? And on what ground does Ms. Marchessault suppose that the existence of "a long history of rivaling interpretations" of Marx's writings on art permits her to discountenance, without further comment, an argument which makes reference to Marx's admiration for some of the achievements of bourgeois culture? If she can answer these questions she may be able to tell us, too, what standard of critical propriety it was which encouraged her to insinuate that the use of Marx's thought in the context of a defence of classical Hollywood cinema is so obviously "suspect" that the dissenting critic need do no more by way of reply than anticipate the right reader's incredulity. The editorial does not say, and does not suggest, either that Marx merely "liked" bourgeois tradition or that the mere fact of "his respect for the great achievements of bourgeois culture" puts a final end to all discussion of the subject. It *does* suggest, however — as seems to be true — that Marx's comments on bourgeois culture are remarkably unlike those allegedly radical, and sometimes allegedly materialist, critiques of "classical realism" which maintain that fictional narratives, by their very nature, reproduce and mystify currently dominant ideologies — or, at best, display symptoms of the contradictions within and between these ideologies. For Marx (one of whose projects was a book on Balzac), the work of the great bourgeois novelists constituted *critical* art — critical, that is, by the standards of the theoretical analysis of capitalism to which Marx devoted his own energies;¹ and this judgement is important and "relevant" now because so much contemporary bourgeois cultural theory denies the very possibility of a critical narrative art and systematically obliter-

ates the evidence of its existence in (for example) the 19th century bourgeois novel. Richard Lippe and Robin Wood do not use Marx "as a means to support an argument for classical Hollywood cinema" but as a witness to the achieved and potential radicalism of the narrative tradition to which the Hollywood cinema belongs, and if Ms. Marchessault thinks that Marx was wrong to discern a critical project in works produced by this tradition she should say so, rather than pretending that her interlocutors introduce Marx's "proper name" as a gratuitous "appendage" to a thesis which would otherwise lack political clout. She should also find some more compelling reason to dispose of Trotsky than the illiteracy of the Soviet peasantry in the 1920s, and abandon, as a matter of principle, the insidious tactic of claiming that political opinions to which she is opposed are not "really" political. The extent to which she is prepared to rely on this tactic is remarkable:

For while minimizing the importance of radically alternative practices in the light that these cannot hope to displace the hegemony of a dominant culture "within any foreseeable future," Lippe and Wood neither offer nor entertain an alternative. Their answer that "the classical Hollywood cinema has not been adequately accounted for" might lead a lazy reader to suppose that the opposition to capitalist society is no longer necessary — not really thinkable within any foreseeable future.

Naturally, having said this Ms. Marchessault at once withdraws: the "lazy reader" is, of course, wrong; but the suggestion has nevertheless been planted that despite their favourable opinion of Marx and Trotsky (window dressing), and despite their avowed aim of formulating the conditions, as they see them, of a "progressive" intellectual project (humbug), Richard Lippe and Robin Wood "neither offer nor entertain an alternative . . . to capitalist society and its dominant practices." From the first words of her essay to the last this is, essentially, Ms. Marchessault's line: confronted by a socialist argument that displeases her, and with nothing to hand that could be graced with the name of an idea, she simply declares: "No, it *isn't* socialist, it's reactionary!"

Although s/he may be wrong about Richard Lippe and Robin Wood, the "lazy reader" will turn out to be right about the yet more reprehensible Andrew Britton, who is up there with Goebbels and Margaret Thatcher in "the great tradition of Reaction," and who not only believes that there is "no place left for revolutionary struggle" but is also actively complicit with the oppression of women, blacks and gays, if not the working-class. I will return to these charges later, but before I do so I must dispense with one of Ms. Marchessault's more tiresome and egregious red herrings.

THE GREAT TRADITION

I have never used, and I do not accept, the concept of "the great tradition" proposed by F.R. Leavis in the book of that title, and I think that the presence of the concept in Richard Lippe's and Robin Wood's editorial is (to be fair to Ms. Marchessault) unfortunate. The "great tradition" to which Leavis refers is not that of "western culture," as the editorial seems to suggest, but that of the English bourgeois novel from Jane Austen to D.H. Lawrence, and his use of the phrase is rather similar to Hegel's use of the concept of *geist*: when he tells us that "the laws conditioning the form of Jane Austen's novels are the same laws that condition . . . those of George Eliot and Henry James and Conrad,"¹² Leavis is claiming, in effect, that the development of prose fiction in England is continuous with the autonomous self-making of a

specific national consciousness or sensibility — a sensibility implicit in the national language but only realised or fulfilled by the few who understand, in the given historical conditions, what the significant use of the language entails. The concept is unintelligible, on Leavis's own showing, and when he tries to define what he means by "the great tradition" and announces that it is "the tradition to which that which is great in English fiction belongs"¹³ he is guilty of more than tautology. He is quite within his rights to claim that certain writers are the greatest novelists in English, but whether they are or not, the proposition that value in itself does, or could, constitute a cultural tradition is plainly unacceptable. Moreover, two of the most important figures in the tradition, James and Conrad, are not English and almost the first point one would make about both of them is that their art is "conditioned" by the influence of a great many national literary traditions. Leavis acknowledges this, and he later tried to include other American novelists besides James in the tradition,¹⁴ but in doing so he merely amplified the same quasi-Hegelian concept of 'the English language' to accommodate the work of the American writers he admired; and we are told, significantly, à propos *Huckleberry Finn* — a novel which, quite rightly, Leavis valued supremely highly — that as "we read the book we are (not) prompted to reflect that (Twain) is a fellow-countryman of Walt Whitman."¹⁵ As Leavis uses it, the idea of 'tradition' has the effect very seriously of distorting the lines of development and patterns of influence in the 19th century English novel, and while he later rectified his most spectacular error of judgement (the dismissal of Dickens as an 'entertainer'), there is no evidence in print that he ever became conscious of the significance of, for example, Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy. Even had he done so, however, he could only have added them to the tradition: the flaw in the concept itself would have remained the same. So if Ms. Marchessault wishes to object to 'the great tradition,' I am happy to agree with her — though I would add that she is in duty bound to object to it in Adorno too, since the theory of 'autonomous art' is based on identical assumptions.¹⁶

Traditions are historical phenomena, and they embody complex but coherent patterns of influence, indebtedness and interrelatedness within a culture, or between cultures, over greater or lesser periods of time. This is the sense in which I use the word 'tradition' in my article, and I presume that Ms. Marchessault does not take exception to the word itself since she postulates traditions in her own essay. The difference between us would appear to be that when I use the concept of tradition I am "investing myself with phallic authority," blocking "the movement of our culture" and "institutionalising art works with a canonical rod," and that when Ms. Marchessault uses it she is only tracing the lineage of a "new political aesthetic." This is as much as to say that she subscribes to the attitudes to the history of western culture which I criticise at length in my account of postmodernism, but instead of saying so and going on to refute my criticisms, she unblushingly reproduces the attitudes and offers them as her reply, for all the world as if the criticisms had not been made. Surely Ms. Marchessault can do a little bit better than this. How does she expect to "identify new questions" if she can neither recognise nor respond to the old ones?

MODERNISM

Ms. Marchessault then proceeds to my remarks on the modern movement. "Intent on demonstrating how postmodernism (its discourses and its art) is antithetical

to real political struggle," she tells us, "Britton sets it against a tradition of high modernism."

High modernism for Britton is not to be understood in Adorno's sense of the word — defined through the contradictions of 'autonomous' art works (contradictory because nothing is autonomous) which radically challenge dominant culture by resisting its forms and pleasures. In contrast to Adorno's thesis . . . Britton insists that *Blonde Venus*, for example, is 'evidence that high modernism could, and once did, exist as a viable popular culture' (p. 16). Thus, Britton sees high modernism as a tradition which includes (among others) the work of Schoenberg, Brecht and the best of Classical Hollywood Cinema.

On the following page, the reader is informed that Andrew Britton "locates similar 'tendencies' in Schoenberg, Brecht and classical Hollywood cinema."

Can Ms. Marchessault read? — and if she can, what is the explanation for the striking discrepancy between this paraphrase and what I actually wrote? It is in a sense true that I "set postmodernism against" the achievements of the modern movement, but I most certainly do not say that postmodernism is reactionary by a standard of radicalism which the modern movement embodies. On the contrary, I quite clearly state:

We have become accustomed to think of the modern movement in the arts as 'progressive' in relation to a dominant bourgeois culture which was 'conservative,' and while this opposition is attractive — and even, in a sense, accurate — we ought to be aware that it can also be construed as an antagonism, internal to the bourgeois tradition, between two conservatisms, the content of which is determined by two radically different understandings of what the tradition *is* and of what the necessary measures are to preserve its integrity and its dominance."

Is it possible to be more cogent than that? This passage must have made *some* impression on Ms. Marchessault, for she later "agrees with (me) that the tradition of bourgeois high culture is profoundly contradictory and we cannot simply theorize an emancipatory potential for it": but she does not at the same time retract her earlier claim that Andrew Britton believes in a homogeneous, and homogeneously radical, modern movement, nor does she provide the reader with much help in negotiating between these two discrepant versions of one of the major points in my essay. The sentence just quoted comes from the part of the article in which I elaborate a case about the representative figure of Schoenberg, whose music (I suggest) had a disruptive social effect not because it was in itself politically radical (it isn't), but because it was experienced, and in part intended, as a direct assault on the tastes and sensibilities of a bourgeois audience which took bourgeois music just as seriously as Schoenberg did, while violently disagreeing with the conclusions he drew from the work of Brahms and Wagner. I argue that the vitality of bourgeois high culture in the 19th century absolutely depended on the existence of increasingly volatile tensions of this kind between artist and audience, both passionately convinced of the supreme value of a tradition which, nevertheless, they *understood* very differently; that each party, to this extent, needed its antagonist; that the antagonism no longer obtains, the social and cultural relations which sustained it having been destroyed during the first half of the 20th century; and that in its absence, bourgeois high culture production has largely degenerated into a solipsistic

game in which the artist's claims to "progressiveness" rest entirely on the assumption, self-deceived and often hypocritical, of a knowing distance from bourgeois traditions which s/he can neither renew nor replace. I offer Godard (amongst others) as exemplary of this state of affairs, styled "postmodern"; and I will take the liberty of pointing out to Ms. Marchessault — who thinks that I am offended with Godard because he "has the audacity to make fun of Shakespeare" — that what I actually accuse him of is flattering his audience's unearned, and utterly unjustified, superiority feelings.

So when Ms. Marchessault asserts, with ironical intention, that I must know "very well that the opposition and challenges of all works of art cannot have the same effect in all places, on all audiences, for all time," I can only reply — without irony — that I *do* indeed know this, and that this was the mere small point I was making. My whole case about modernism in the arts *amounts* to the proposition that the oppositional force of the modern movement was determined, or enabled, by the structural position of bourgeois culture within the totality of bourgeois social relations in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Before there can be an artist who is radical in Schoenberg's way, there must be what Ms. Marchessault elsewhere calls "historically sanctioned institutions" of cultural production which have immense social prestige and importance, and an audience for those institutions which sees itself as their guardian, refuses to tolerate dissonance in any other context than that of Richard Strauss's banal pictorialism, and endorses Strauss's judicious retreat from the path which Schoenberg and his pupils pursued with such heroic dedication. The resistance which Schoenberg encountered was the logical and inevitable consequence of the fact that bourgeois high culture, when he was working, was *not* "concerned primarily with the aesthetic realm of experience," as Ms. Marchessault seems to imagine, but was viewed by all parties as a field of struggle where social issues of paramount importance were at stake. The historical forms of bourgeois society which endowed bourgeois culture with this kind of significance have long since vanished, and the material position in which a bourgeois cultural vanguard might be constituted has vanished with them.

Ms. Marchessault is perfectly willing to believe that nobody is challenged by Schoenberg anymore because his music has been "commodified," but she recoils from the idea that there cannot be a bourgeois cultural vanguard anymore because bourgeois culture has changed. She never explains why "the opposition and challenges of all works of art cannot have the same effect in all places, on all audiences, for all time" while the avant-garde remains an idea of universal validity; but the explanation is not very hard to find. If it is really true that we *cannot* be challenged by Schoenberg anymore because of the commodity form or, alternatively, the canonical rod of the Great Tradition, then what I called in my article "the contemporary bourgeoisie's loathsome philistine indifference to its own cultural past" is not only inevitable but also salutary and progressive, and the sentiments to which I took exception in my account of Godard's *King Lear* (as a representative postmodern film) can be thought of as being radical after all. The cultural past is *objectively* superannuated, and if the enlightened no longer discern any evidence of cultural critique or "political resistance" in Schoenberg or Shakespeare (as opposed to Glass and Godard) that is because these qualities are no longer there in the works. As a theory of the development of cultivated bourgeois taste over the last hundred years or so this is at once ingenious and

novel, but I have to admit that I prefer my own.

I draw several conclusions from this analysis. I argue, firstly, that the promotion of 'postmodern culture,' not merely as a vanguard of the same kind but as the first *real* vanguard in recorded history, is obviously risible, and that its absurdity is very tellingly betrayed both in the poverty of the culture and in the inconsequence of the promotional critical materials. Secondly, I suggest that far from being a vanguard, postmodern artists and their apologists actually represent a form of bourgeois cultural reaction. Because the structural position of bourgeois culture has changed, they are no longer objectively implicated in cultural struggle, as post-Romantic bourgeois artists were, but instead of acknowledging or acting on this fact, they are content to pretend that the irony to which they are doomed is in itself an act of resistance. One of the objects of this irony is the cultural past, understood as a collection of odds and ends which cannot be distinguished one from another in terms of their value or ideological orientation;⁷ and I argue, thirdly, that this attitude to history, although offered as incontrovertible evidence of the radicalism of postmodern culture, is both morally odious and politically retrograde. It strikes from the record of human achievement the cultural struggles of the past, for no better reason than that the postmodern artist would like to feel that s/he has seen through everything, and it obliterates a legacy of realised cultural critique, opposition and analysis in the field of art which remains immensely valuable to radical artists and students of culture today. Finally, I claim that the site of cultural struggle in the world in which we live is no longer the bourgeois art gallery or the concert hall but the culture of the market-place, and that radicals should plan and debate strategies for intervening in this culture.

In her reply (if 'reply' is the word), Ms. Marchessault, as is her wont, chooses to ignore the fact that I *do* indeed set out to demonstrate that postmodernism is "antithetical to real political struggle" — or rather, she chooses to maintain that I *do not*: my real aim is "the recuperation of the great western tradition." The operative term in this phrase is the noun "recuperation." Ms. Marchessault assumes in advance that the reader will share her own conviction that "western culture" is exactly what postmodernism has declared it to be; and she assumes this with sufficient confidence to anticipate the reader's consent to the judgement that a hostile critic of the postmodern line on history must obviously wish to "recuperate" a cultural past universally known to be bankrupt. This assumption has the great practical advantage, from Ms. Marchessault's point-of-view, that it spares her the tedious labour of refuting the critique of postmodernism's cancellation of centuries of artistic production which, in my essay, I actually make. The one talismanic word — "recuperation" — does Ms. Marchessault's work for her. It is obvious to all of us (she implies) that any interest in, or favourable judgement of, the culture consigned to well-deserved oblivion by postmodernism *must* be of the kind to which the word applies: so all we need do, when faced with such judgments, is summon up the word.

To do her justice, I appreciate Ms. Marchessault's difficulty. She obviously agrees with the accounts both of bourgeois and of 'popular' culture which I criticise, but she is also aware of the extremely damaging things that can be said against them; and as a result, she finds herself in the awkward and embarrassing position of subscribing in general to ideas which she can neither expound nor defend in particular. Her rhetorical options, therefore, are virtually reduced to pejorative

travesty of her antagonists on the one hand and self-contradiction on the other, and she oscillates between these antipodes with dizzying speed. As we have seen, Trotsky's writings on bourgeois culture can be explained away by the backwardness of the Russian peasantry, and Marx's by "the long history of rivaling interpretations" which they have inspired — so why not accuse Andrew Britton (two very much more formidable figures having been so easily accounted for) of nursing "a bizarre nostalgia for the Great Tradition," and of locating similar tendencies in Schoenberg, Brecht and the classical Hollywood cinema? The word "bizarre" Ms. Marchessault should leave in future to tabloid journalists composing editorials about lesbian mothers and marijuana parties, and while I have no particular objection, on principle, to feelings of nostalgia, I would have been happier, in the present case, if Ms. Marchessault had troubled to indicate that the feelings about bourgeois culture which I express in my article are not nostalgic but political. Can Ms. Marchessault sustain the argument that bourgeois culture is devoid of critical value or can she not? — and if she can't, why did she commit herself to paper on the subject?

The astonishing claim that I locate "similar tendencies" in Schoenberg, Brecht and classical Hollywood cinema illustrates Ms. Marchessault's theoretical predicament with exceptional clarity. When she reads (or re-reads) my essay, she will discover that I associate Brecht's work in the 20s and 30s with an attempt to challenge the institutionalised distinction between high art and the culture of the market. I also say that Adorno's theory of the autonomous work of art

has had the very serious effect of obscuring the fact that one of the major impulses in a great deal of 19th century bourgeois art is to undermine the rules of decorum and propriety through which the Enlightenment had sought to constitute art as a specialized practice with as few external contacts as possible;

and that "certain tendencies in the modern movement and in the earlier Romantic tradition with which the modern movement is continuous" produced artists who, while remaining bourgeois artists, were also opposed to the hiving off of culture from the vulgar life of the market-place and expressed a very powerful resistance to it. I give examples of such artists and traditions, and if I did not include Schoenberg that is because he took the distinction between high and commercial culture completely for granted. It would be difficult to imagine a less Brechtian institution than the Society for the Private Performance of Music, and far from judging that the "tendencies" of Schoenberg and Brecht are "similar," I say (with what I would have thought was unmistakeable clarity) that their art is exemplary of *contradictory* developments within bourgeois culture. I do not judge, either, that the tendencies of the Second Viennese School are similar to those of the classical Hollywood cinema. I *do* say, however, that the most fundamental influence on the artistic development of the Hollywood cinema from the early 30s onwards was the wholesale emigration of the Weimar Republic to California, and that by the time of the Second World War the Hollywood studios were regularly producing large numbers of major masterpieces in which this influence has been intelligently absorbed and acted on, and in which the opposition between modernist high culture and capitalist commercial culture has been abolished.

It is this proposition, of course, that Ms. Marchessault cannot countenance: everything in left-wing cultural studies goes clean against it. Hollywood = the dominant culture; cultural resistance = the avant-garde, "localized practices,"

"smaller traditions." I have to confess that I lack the patience to address these equations yet again; so I will simply say to Ms Marchessault that if these are equations she wants, she will have to make up her mind about her theoretical allegiances, which seem at the moment to be somewhat confused. You cannot assert on page nine (*with Adorno against von Sternberg*) that "autonomous art works . . . radically challenge dominant culture by resisting its forms and pleasures," and then go on to assert on page ten (*with Benjamin and Brecht against Adorno*) that Russian Constructivism and epic theatre are valuable because they "cannot be reduced to the tradition of bourgeois high culture." You cannot concede on page eleven that Hollywood is not reducible to the culture industry if you have already claimed on page nine that one of the problems that faces "many artists" is the "relation between culture and commodity" and that Schoenberg's music "ceased to compromise political resistance" as soon as it had been "commodified." And you cannot long on page ten for "a new political aesthetic that (will) be intelligible to all" if you also believe that the one condition on which this universally intelligible aesthetic could become generally available — in the form of works which appear on the market as commodities — would have the effect of depriving it of its oppositional force. Which of these horses does Ms. Marchessault wish to back? — or is the function of theory merely to serve the forensic purposes of the moment?

TREES OR KIDNEY BEANS?

"You want our party, in the name of the proletariat, to officially adopt your little artistic factory. You think that, having planted a kidney bean in a flower pot, you are capable of raising the tree of proletarian literature. That is not the way. No tree can be grown from a kidney bean."

— Leon Trotsky, "Class and Art"

According to Ms. Marchessault, I close my argument with a choice: *Dynasty* or recent Godard. I do say, it is true, that faced with the option of watching *Dynasty* or *Je Vous Salue, Marie* I would select the former without hesitation: it is somewhat more interesting and very considerably less unpleasant, and — although (as I remarked) deplorable by any reasonable artistic standard — at least something more than the culture of a club for the 80s version of *l'homme sensuel moyen*. The choice, however, is not absolute (I criticise both the show and the film adversely): and if these are indeed my only options, why does Ms. Marchessault traduce me, only three sentences earlier, for foisting the Great Tradition on my readers as their "only alternative" (her italics)? The diversity of these accounts of my conclusions might seem to indicate that she could no more be bothered to read her own essay before publishing it than she could to read mine before criticising it; but in fact a more credible explanation is available. Ms. Marchessault wishes to rescue the idea of cultural vanguardism, to which she is obviously much attached, but since she has not the shred of a case — has nothing, in fact, but the intensity of her attachment — she is obliged to make my objections to this idea look absurd. The precise nature of their absurdity is of no great interest to her, and she is as happy to accuse me of offering *Dynasty* as the (or an) alternative to Godard as of bizarre nostalgia for the Great Tradition — to which, presumably, I think that *Dynasty* belongs. All that is necessary to create the impression, by dint of strenuous rhetorical buccaneering, that because I am opposed to vanguardist conceptions of cultural struggle I am

therefore opposed to anti-capitalist cultural struggle *tout court*, despite the appearance to the contrary. Ms. Marchessault has learned her lesson by rote. A radical avant-garde familiar with the higher Theory produces radical art; this art is then widely distributed (without becoming a commodity in the process); a longing for "collectively change" is incited in the bosom of the masses (Canadian); radical changes in the social formation result: *that* is the essential argument.

I remain to be convinced, and my doubts are only confirmed by Ms. Marchessault's comments on what she calls (in a less felicitous phrase) "the great utopic kernel." Is there even the most remote connection between "the revolutionary avant-garde" which she exemplifies with the names of Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Tretyakov, Mayakovsky and Brecht and any avant-garde which is practising now? As Ms. Marchessault does not cite a single contemporary work which, in her opinion, derives from, or has been influenced by, this "tradition," I hesitate to accuse her of believing that there *is* one; but the whole structure and tenor of her argument would seem to suggest that contemporary experimental film production in Canada is related to Brecht and Eisenstein by direct descent, the missing link being supplied by the thought of Derrida — or at least, by radical appropriations of it. If this suggestion really does constitute a definition of the goals and preoccupations of the "localized practises" and "smaller traditions" which Ms. Marchessault is recommending to us, I can only reply, with Trotsky:

Splendid, we are ready to accept (this) definition. Give us, though, not only the definition but also the literature.⁹

I admit that my acquaintance with Canadian experimental film is limited; but insofar as I am familiar with the work of Michael Snow and Bruce Elder and Joyce Wieland, I have to say that "the impulse to do away with the institution of 'art' completely" and to "integrate (art) into the praxis of everyday life" does not impress me as its most striking characteristic, and that while the influence of structuralism and post-structuralism on these artists is patently obvious, the influence of Brecht and Meyerhold is, on the whole, less so. Of course, these may not be the artists that Ms. Marchessault has in mind, and I am certainly prepared to be enlightened; but at the risk of creating further annoyance, I have to report that *all* the contemporary 'experimental' films I know of, Canadian and other, actively reinforce "the institution of 'art'" to which she is opposed. Ms. Marchessault tells us that "the role of the critic today" must be to create "a factory of politics": but why bother when that is precisely what we have already got? I myself would prefer to join Trotsky on the picket-line outside the gates of this factory, for whatever the politics are that get created within it, they will not be the politics of socialist culture. They will be what they show themselves to be in Ms. Marchessault's essay, and while it would be nice to think that a band of advanced intellectuals, producing and establishing critical traditions for advanced art-works, will turn the world on its ear in a trice, this innocent ambition is more likely to produce, in practice, a gentleman's club where (for example) Derrida writes a text in praise of the art of Adami, who immediately produces a new art-work incorporating Derrida's text, thus spawning another Derridean text in praise of Adami's art. This is the high-brow equivalent of the *Star Wars* industry, and no contemporary cultural vanguard has the slightest prospect of coming up with anything better. When Ms. Marchessault calls on Brecht and the Russian formalists to give credence to her nameless vanguard, she is really doing nothing more than *Screen* did many years ago when it appropriated the same

names to lend choral support to hymns in praise of *Penthesilea*, *The Nightcleaners* and *The Song of the Shirt*. These works are both pathetically inferior to, and unrecognizably different from, *Strike* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and while Ms. Marchessault does not name her own hostages to fortune, I will assume, until further evidence is forthcoming, that they bear a closer resemblance to the productions of the Berwick Street Collective than to those of Brecht and Weill.

I do not understand, in any case, what Ms. Marchessault means when she says that her revolutionary avant-garde is revolutionary — though I see that it consists of a rather diverse collection of socialists. *Politically* revolutionary? There is nothing answering to this description in Eisenstein's silent films, which are (with the exception of *Strike*) quite plainly Stalinist propaganda, disturbed and unbalanced by the intervention of a director who was not a Stalinist. The only Eisenstein film which articulates a radical political critique of the actually existing social world is *Ivan the Terrible*; and while *Ivan* is a great masterpiece, and one of the few works of art which has ever criticised Stalinism from the left, it is not, and could not conceivably have been, "revolutionary" (the film ends in total despair) and it is not avant-garde. And why should Ms. Marchessault think it worth her while to summon Eisenstein — whose favourite film was *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and whose theory and practice as an artist were profoundly influenced (on his own admission) by Milton, El Greco, Wagner, Shakespeare, Dickens, Griffith and Daumier — to appear for the prosecution in the case of the avant-garde v. "the tradition of bourgeois high culture?" What more use can she have for Brecht? — the Brecht who admired Jacobean theatre, and whom Walter Benjamin derived not only from "the legacy of medieval and baroque drama" but from a tradition (the fell word is actually used) in which he includes both Strindberg and the arch-bourgeois Goethe?¹⁰ Is it possible to draw a line of the clarity Ms. Marchessault would like between *The Threepenny Opera* (avant-garde) and Berg's *Wozzeck* (bourgeois high modernism?) — and once we have accepted that "the tradition of bourgeois high culture" is not of the kind to which the word "reduced" is appropriate, is it necessary to carry on insisting that Brecht and Eisenstein cannot be reduced to it? The artists Ms. Marchessault refers to seem to me to have been bourgeois artists who wrote as socialists. There is nothing else they could have been, there is nothing wrong with them because this is what they were, and we do a great deal more harm than good by lifting them out of history as examples of a pure "revolutionary" art. The work of all of them contains reactionary as well as critical elements, none of them is exempt from ambivalence or contradiction, and we can no more "simply theorize an emancipatory potential" for them than we can for Schoenberg, still less hive them off from the world in which they lived and claim that the only relation they had to it was one of unmediated opposition.¹¹ I can see that the idea of a pure revolutionary art (in her need for which, of course, Ms. Marchessault is not alone) is pleasing, but it is, nevertheless, an idea that ought to be got over. It can never be satisfied, and if pursued relentlessly enough in real life, it can have unhappy material consequences.

CRITICAL THEORY

Ms. Marchessault is as deeply offended by my remarks about cultural theory as she is by my remarks about art, but in this instance her unwillingness, or incapacity, to make even a show of engaging with the case I actually

present is, if anything, even more striking. She accuses me of

running roughshod over the very important differences between the Frankfurt School, post-structuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism as if they were all part of some secret conspiracy — 'The Bourgeois Intelligentsia in the Age of Reagan'."

This is Ms. Marchessault's inimitable way of alluding to the section of my essay in which I propose that Fredric Jameson's theory of the cultural logic of late capitalism, the theory of the "culture industry" expounded in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Attali's account of the commodification of music are structurally identical and that the obstinate recurrence of this structure, over a period of 50 years, and in spite of some very striking changes in intellectual fashions, reflects, not "some secret conspiracy," but "a very serious blockage in Marxist thought about culture in general and the commodity form of culture in particular." I conduct this argument in considerable detail, quoting from the three works in question to illustrate the conceptual framework, the assumptions and the vocabulary which they have in common; and I note in conclusion, with particular reference to Adorno's appropriation of the ideology of *kunst* promulgated by 19th century German idealist aesthetics, that the ideas about the relation between culture and the market shared by Adorno, Jameson and Attali are not Marxist at all, but bourgeois. Had space allowed, I might have added that the Frankfurt dualism of "autonomous" and "dependent" art is reproduced yet again in the film theory of *Screen* in its structuralist phase (where "ideology," as theorised by Althusser, plays the role which Adorno assigned to the commodity form), and that the "culture industry" thesis, for all the pseudo-Marxist idioms in which it is couched, has been found congenial by contemporary cultural theorists who are explicitly opposed to Marxism in all its forms. Leavis's pamphlet on "mass civilisation and minority culture" was written at about the same time as Adorno's early work and is permeated with many of the same attitudes;¹¹ and the substantive differences between Adorno's jeremiads against Hollywood and the radio and Baudrillard's "requiem for the media" are hardly worth noting — although Baudrillard has been for many years a virulent Cold War anti-communist.¹²

My purpose in drawing attention to these resemblances (which are less than obscure) was to demonstrate that the recapitulation of Adorno's analysis of *monopoly* capitalism in Mr. Jameson's analysis of *multinational* capitalism represents something more significant than coincidence or plagiarism or unconscious reminiscence. As it happens, I do not stand in need of instruction from Ms. Marchessault on the nature of the distinction which can be made between "the Frankfurt School, post-structuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism," for I can just about make out that Baudrillard deploys the theory of the sign and Adorno does not. I was concerned, however, with the similarities and with the circulation, across these different schools of thought, of a single set of terms. Again and again, the findings are always the same: the most recent development in cultural technology (that is to say, under capitalist conditions, the most recent commodity form of art) represents the final subordination of culture to the authoritarian logic of the status quo and of 'the subject' to the value systems of the ruling élite. Having been isolated as an object of inquiry, culture is then theorised as the site of irresistible capitalist triumph — or the triumph, at any rate, of some Byzantine 'total system'; for Marxist rhetoric can be filtered out of this discourse just as easily as it can be ladled in, which is why persons of such diverse political persuasions (who have in common, nevertheless, a loss of

faith in, or hostility to, the socialist programme) have found the discourse irresistibly alluring. It is possible, of course, to turn the whole thesis on its head, and insist that the total system is nice rather than nasty or that the cultural technology heralds the dawn of a new age for mankind, but the dystopian variant can be said, on the whole, to have shown greater staying-power; and besides, the fact that its utopian counterpart lends itself to the purposes of a right-wing Catholic ideologue like McLuhan as much as to those of a distinguished radical intellectual like Benjamin is an even more salutary warning against all determinisms of cultural technique than the alignment between Adorno and Baudrillard. The alleged 'debate' between Benjamin and Adorno is vitiated by their agreement on fundamentals: Benjamin's analysis in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is identical to Adorno's, but Adorno's value-judgments have been reversed. One might make a different but related point about the relationship between Marshall McLuhan and Arthur Kroker if one were prepared to take them seriously.

Critical Theory of this kind is in no way critical, and I am quite convinced that it is incompatible with socialism. Benjamin was indeed a revolutionary socialist, but he does not reach revolutionary conclusions in his famous essay: the proposition that film technology is intrinsically emancipatory and (in the Brechtian sense) alienating is as gratuitous and mystifying as Adorno's belief that it is the agent of a sort of secular equivalent of the Fall. The terms which Benjamin is using only make sense in the context of his antagonist's political convictions. Adorno is more than happy, on any day of the week, to treat us to a display of *saeva indignatio*, but he denies, and systematically theorises out, the possibility of change, and from the very beginning the analytical tradition, or world-view, which Adorno, Baudrillard and Mr. Jameson profess has postulated a social reality of seamless, rational, oppressive closure that cannot be resisted or transformed. Politically, the corollary of this analysis in practice is a nihilistic quietism. Social contradiction and radical energy are always vestigial, just vanquished by a new medium or another expansion of the market, and there is nothing for it but to don the mantle of Jeremiah or, in Mr. Jameson's case, to set up as a well-meaning, if less than sanguine, cartographer in the lobby of the Bonaventura Hotel, offering guided tours to such of its denizens as retain the subjectivity required to profit from them.

Ms. Marchessault has not a single word to say about my argument in its detail or its sum, and her only recourse (as usual) is to bluff her way out of a debate which she has initiated but in which, it would seem, she is quite helpless to participate — this time, by intimating to the reader (who is assumed not to have read, and to lack the parts to read, my essay) that Andrew Britton believes in "some secret conspiracy" of the bourgeois intelligentsia. In this Ms. Marchessault's idea of "constructive contentiousness?" If she is genuinely convinced that the ideas of Adorno, Jameson, Attali and Baudrillard are *not* alike in the ways which I show them to be — with specific concrete reference to their work — then she ought to say *why*, for my benefit and that of the readership of *CineAction!*, explaining at the same time (in detail) what those "very important differences" are which cancel out the similarities I analyse.

When we come to deconstruction, Ms. Marchessault's charges are, if not acceptable, at least a little more specific.

Michael Ryan's *Deconstruction and Marxism* (1982) has taken great pains to show that any critique of deconstruc-

tion must begin by distinguishing between Derrida's work and the practices of his keener right-wing acolytes at Yale. Derrida has been highly critical of the American versions of deconstruction which have taken his anti-empiricist statement 'there is nothing beyond the text' to its most ridiculous textual extremes . . . Furthermore, Derrida has maintained that deconstruction is a political tool which must address 'solid structures,' 'material' institutions and not only . . . discourses or signifying representations' (*The Truth in Painting*, p. 19).

If Derrida has indeed been "highly critical of the American versions of deconstruction," that is because (I would say) the distillation of the logic of his philosophy in the pure air of the Ivy League English Department must indeed be deeply embarrassing for a writer who is trying to make a decent living as an avant-garde intellectual in Paris, and I would have been happier altogether if Ms. Marchessault had explained to me why Derrida has "right-wing acolytes" at all. Why is it that deconstruction has caught on in this milieu while the Transitional Programme, for example, or socialist feminism have not? Is there *nothing* in Derrida's work that helps to explain this disgusting perversion? — nothing that might warrant the conclusion that the North American academy has done no more than take to its "most ridiculous textual extremes" an extreme that is already, in itself, ridiculous? How could the thesis that "there is nothing beyond the text" be *more* ridiculous than it is in its original form? — and in what sense can this thesis be defined as "anti-empiricist"? Empiricism asserts that all knowledge derives from the perceptions of the senses, and Derrida's formula disposes of a good deal more than *that*. How, too, can one conceive the possibility of "addressing material institutions" in terms of a discourse which denies the existence of such institutions, and renders them entirely unthinkable? And what — overlooking this contradiction — does the "deconstruction" of these institutions actually involve? Who are the agents who wield this "political tool"? — in whose interests do they wield it? — and what, practically, do they do when the process of deconstruction has run its course?¹³

Derrida is naturally indifferent to these questions, as he tacitly admits by placing the word "material" in quotation marks, but I am sure that Ms. Marchessault has an answer to them, if only because she writes as a socialist feminist and Derrida has notoriously declared that feminism is "castrated and castrating." This remark accounts in itself for the right-wing acolytes at Yale, who had probably already reached the same conclusion on their own, but I await with suspense Ms. Marchessault's exposition of the grounds on which the work of an explicitly anti-feminist philosopher who maintains that there is no knowable reality external to discourse can be appropriated for the purposes of a progressive politics. She *does* say that deconstruction

has, for a socialist feminism in particular, led to an understanding that structures of power, political interventions and subjectivity must be thought differently — that truth itself must be grounded in an historical material conjuncture

— but I am afraid to say that I do not know what she means. Why should a *socialist* feminism — and "in particular," too — have needed to wait for Derrida to come along to obtain an understanding of "historical material conjunctures"? — and how, having waited, did it assuage its need, given that the concepts of the "historical" and the "material" are alien to Derrida's thought? And what is "truth itself"? — a term, surely, which is completely incompatible with the philosophy of deconstruction as it is with socialism. I assume from what

Ms. Marchessault says that "truth itself" precedes, or is in some way external to, the historical material conjuncture in which "it must be grounded," and if this is so I would like to hear from her — at her convenience — where truth now is, or was, and how the process of grounding it took, or will take, place. I ask — as Lady Bracknell put it — merely for information.

CANADIAN CULTURE

Marxism cannot be reconciled with nationalism, be it even of the 'most just', 'purest', most refined and civilised brand.

— Lenin (*Collected Works*, Vol. 20, p. 34)

Ms. Marchessault writes as a Canadian; and it is, apparently, the fact that I do *not* that blinds me to the essential relevance and felicity of the work of Mr. Arthur Kroker.

That Britton dismisses Kroker's 'horror show' on the basis that the social conditions it describes are 'wrong' (*sic*) is somewhat understandable in the sense that Kroker does have a flair for the dramatic. However, the conditions that he and Michael Dorland describe as 'the absolute domination of parasitism plus' (*CineAction!* 10, p. 5) are accurate. Here, they are referring to certain cultural realities, particular to Canada, with which Britton is perhaps not familiar: the fact that 97 per cent of Canadian screen time is allotted to American cinema; the fact that 95 per cent of these box office receipts goes back into American production; the fact that 95 per cent of Canadian television drama is American; the fact that Canada has never had the opportunity to develop a proper distribution system because American distributors have had monopolies on our theatres for over half a century; the fact that there is little hope for change given that our policy makers have always in the last instance refused to impose quotas for fear of American 'retaliation'; the fact (finally) that we are the only country in the world in which this situation exists to such a degree that I am told the expression 'Canadianization of the film industry' has been used as a synonym, in other countries, for American Cultural Imperialism. As Joyce Nelson has recently pointed out, 'this is not internationalism, this is colonization' (*Borderlines*, #13).

It is indeed true that I am not a Canadian, though on the other hand I have been living in Canada on and off for the last 10 years and the "cultural realities" of Canadian life do not seem to me to be so arcane and esoteric that they are only readable by persons immersed in them from birth. Speaking purely as an outsider, then, let me risk the suggestion that if the phrase "the absolute domination of parasitism plus" is in any way representative of the interpretation of Canada's relationship to the United States which prevails amongst left-wing Canadian intellectuals we have a very obvious explanation for the incoherence, pusillanimousness and ineptitude of the opposition to Free Trade by the Canadian left. The idea that Canada is a "colony" is absurd and grotesque. Canada is an advanced capitalist country with an oppressed population of indigenous natives, two major stock exchanges, a secret police force and an autonomous Intelligence agency equivalent to, and closely associated with, the CIA. It is a signatory of the North Atlantic Treaty, it has a staff college and a large standing army which participates as a matter of course in occupation duties on behalf of world imperialism, and it collaborates with the ruling class of the United States in the production and testing of nuclear weapons. "Parasit-

ism" (never mind "parasitism plus") is a somewhat tendentious and self-serving description of an alliance in which, for all practical purposes, the host co-operates with such spectacular enthusiasm, and while Ms. Marchessault's vision of Canadian policy-makers trembling in fear of American retribution may be soothing, it is not — to the bilious foreign eye — particularly credible. The Canadian ruling class behaves as it does, not out of fear, but with conscious, deliberate and unembarrassed intention, because it understands (quite correctly from its own point of view) that the rank of a lieutenant in the international capitalist economy is better than the rank of a private, and that the lieutenant, although he is certainly not the general, enjoys substantial privileges of his own. It is perfectly true, of course, that US capitalism will derive greater benefits from the Free Trade deal than Canadian capitalism, but this fact is merely a given of the current balance of economic forces on a world scale, and the Canadian ruling class has therefore taken the line of colluding with an economic project to which it has no more viable alternative and making as much money out of it as possible.

In the light of these unfortunate facts, Ms. Marchessault's call for a dynamic, oppositional cultural nationalism in Canada is doomed to go unanswered. "Accounting for classical Hollywood cinema — in Canada, in 1988 — remains for me, an academic undertaking," Ms. Marchessault informs us:

I cannot for even a moment think that one more interpretation of *Vertigo* — no matter how radical, no matter how great the film — is going to change the social formation. Comrades, let us define our terms.

Indeed! — and as we define them, let us remind ourselves that while no work of art and no enterprise in the field of cultural criticism has ever possessed or will ever acquire the power to change a social formation, a Canadian film-maker who understood why, and in what ways, *Vertigo* was a great radical masterpiece might stand a chance of producing a feminist film more impressive than *A Winter Tan*, and would certainly feel the reverse of a tendency to believe that the mere fact of living "in Canada," in 1988 or at any other time, had any direct bearing on his/her sense of the value, political significance or potential uses of *Vertigo*. The screens of the nation could be flooded with experimental Canadian videotapes tomorrow, but the social formation would remain absolutely unchanged; and no amount of emphasis, practical or theoretical, on a Canadian "tradition of experiencing exclusion" and "localized" Canadian practices will have the effect of creating an alternative Canadian culture, let alone a progressive one. Cultures cannot be brought into being through an act of will. They are deeply rooted in the practical economic and political realities of daily life, and these realities — "in Canada, in 1988" — are not like those of El Salvador but like those of the world's other leading capitalist powers.

It follows that Canadian cultural nationalism cannot be, in practice, other than wholly reactionary, and that persons committed to the aim of generating and consolidating cultural opposition in Canada — an aim which (though Ms. Marchessault will not believe me) I heartily endorse — must begin by striking any version of nationalism off their agenda. In a capitalist state the discourse of nationalism is objectively tied to the interests of the right, and we need look no further for evidence of the truth of this proposition than the last Canadian election, in which this discourse turned out to be the Hon. Brian Mulroney's trump card. He played it (to give him credit) with consummate skill, and by appealing both to the nationalism of Canada as a whole and to various local

nationalisms within it he succeeded in decimating the widespread popular opposition to Free Trade — much to the dismay of his adversaries, who had been labouring under the delusion that nationalism was going to be their trump card too. The lesson of this *débâcle* is that Canadian socialists cannot afford to raise the questions of sovereignty and of economic and cultural self-determination in nationalist terms. These questions are crucial, but they must be posed — as they are posed already in Cuba and Latin America, where nationalist ideologies would be very much more excusable than they are in a country with a “special relationship” to the United States — in the context of a critique of international capitalism, and of the Canadian ruling class as an active, willing and autonomous agent in the international capitalist order. Free Trade may well be disastrous for Canada — but how can Canadian socialists point out this fact without pointing out, too, that Canadian capitalists will profit from it at the expense of the Canadian working class; that they are prepared to sacrifice all other considerations in order to realise this profit; that they are not the dupes or passive victims of an American design to ‘take over Canada’ but the colleagues of other capitalists in the United States; and that both these national capitalisms have a common interest in the economic arrangements which bode ill for industrial workers in Hamilton, Ontario and for ‘Canadian culture’ — not to mention a common interest in ‘keeping the peace’ in those areas of the Third World which lie to the south of Niagara Falls? If the Canadian left tries to appropriate the language of national self-assertion and self-definition for what it believes to be its own purposes, it will never succeed in producing anything better than a mixture of truculent, provincial chauvinism and bourgeois anti-Americanism, purporting to be radical.

At some level Ms. Marchessault seems to want to deny that she is a cultural nationalist, for she is capable of advancing, in all seriousness, the (to me) astonishing claim that “the emphasis in Canada has never been Canadian cinema.” The emphasis in Canada is Canadian cinema to a quite obsessional degree: and indeed, Ms. Marchessault goes on to say, in her very next sentence:

Whether these are locally produced videos, experimental, feminist documentaries, or mainstream films, ours is a tradition which ‘few have heard of, fewer have seen, and most have little chance of seeing.’

This lament would not be out of place in the culture slot on *The Journal* or the review pages of the *Globe and Mail*, but the very fact that it is everybody’s lament makes it an inadequate basis for a specifically socialist-feminist cultural programme. The transformation of the conditions which Ms. Marchessault describes would not produce “an oppositional public sphere” (her professed goal) in Canada, and it seems to me that this goal is unlikely to be realised at all under the aegis of a socialism which attributes the nature of Canadian culture as it is to the effects of colonisation by the United States and which, to such odd effect, equates an “oppositional public sphere” with a world in which experimental Canadian videotapes are universally accessible. By all means let us “directly challenge distribution networks, broadcast policies and exhibition venues that in Canada have made it impossible to see even our ‘commercial’ films”: but what, having challenged them, are we going to put in their place? — and what difference will our challenge make if we have no more focussed and energetic an idea of what is at stake in a radical intervention in North American capitalist culture than any that can be deduced from Ms. Marchessault’s essay? Ms. Marchessault,

in fact, has no idea at all. There is Yankee cultural imperialism, and there is a radical Canadian culture which has been submerged, slighted, muffled and effaced: the aim, then, is to replace the one of them with the other. I do not know how this cultural revolution is to be effected, but since it does not seem to involve revolution in any of the more vulgar senses of the word — since it seems, indeed, to be a purely cultural phenomenon, which takes place independently of economic and political change, and which is incompatible only with the control of film distribution by foreigners — I can say no more than that I decline to believe in it. The creation of an oppositional public sphere is an admirable aim in itself, and in fact I share it, but the road to which Ms. Marchessault points does not lead towards it, if only because it does not lead anywhere. Her agenda is pure fantasy, produced by the cobbling together of bourgeois nationalism and pseudo-leftist cultural vanguardism, and her politics amount to the grooming and promotion of this wretched mongrel as a new and higher form of animal life.

Ms. Marchessault’s militant Podsnappery seems all the more perverse because nationalism and its consequences represent problems of quite exceptional gravity for the Canadian artist. The most damaging of these consequences is that Canadian culture is parochial and depoliticised to an extent which must be found absolutely astonishing by an observer from one of the ‘other countries.’ This is not to say, of course, that nationalist discourses of various kinds have ceased to play a mischievous and mystifying part in French or American or British culture, but in Canada these are the only political discourses that there are: they constitute, at one and the same time, both the dominant ideology and the organising principle of protest against it. All parties contending in the public sphere defer to these discourses and claim them as their own rightful property, and every political and cultural issue under the sun is articulated, by both the right and the left, in nationalist terms, with the result that the ideological content of cultural life in Canada is virtually monothematic: the only alternative to the nationalism promulgated by the Canadian ruling class is (to take up Lenin’s terms) a ‘purer,’ ‘more just,’ ‘more refined and civilised brand’ of nationalism promulgated somewhere vaguely to its left. Given the fact that Canada is an advanced capitalist state, this is as much as to say that the ‘more refined’ nationalisms have the effect of pre-empting the development of a popular anti-capitalist politics and of dissipating the energies of resistance and dissent, which become an easy prey to any moderately sophisticated form of populism. The case of Quebec, where the radical potential of an exceptionally assertive and self-conscious working-class has been progressively diverted into xenophobic chauvinism, and where triumphant Tory reaction is now harvesting the fruits of decades of separatist militancy, is exemplary in this respect. In the material world, the politics of national or local difference tend to exist in the form of the politics of sameness, and if we stake too much on our traditions of experiencing exclusion we run the unfortunate risk of being *included* — in a social order which has shortcomings over and above its failure to recognise what is special about us.

The socialist Canadian artist is therefore faced with the Herculean task of producing a political art under social conditions in which the available ideologies of cultural resistance are more or less abrasive variants of bourgeois nationalism, and such an artist is likely to discover very quickly both that s/he is working in a vacuum and that s/he has no audience. If the task of the Canadian artist is to discover, or to establish the hegemony of, a distinctly Canadian culture — as every-

one seems to agree — who does the socialist film-maker address, and how does s/he avoid the disadvantages of being marginalised on the one hand and causing universal offence on the other? S/he will find few takers amongst those for whom *The Decline of the American Empire* is self-evidently a great Canadian film, and even fewer, perhaps, in Ms. Marchessault's factory of politics, where it is possible — and almost customary — to object to the work of foreign directors on the grounds of their *being* foreign. In that this objection carries the authority of a spokesperson of Canadian socialism, I would say that the prospects of a socialist cinema in Canada are even more depressing than Ms. Marchessault allows.

She will disagree with me, I know, but I will add in any case that the provenance of nationalism in Canada is primarily significant when construed in relation to the chronic weakness of the NDP. If Ms. Marchessault believes, then, that a further dose of the politics of Canadian difference, dispensed by socialist feminists, will inspire something *more* progressive than social democracy, what explanation does she have for Canada's inability to sustain an even moderately viable national reformism?

ON ETIQUETTE

I hope that Ms. Marchessault will forgive me if I conclude with a few words on the subject of propriety. "I must state in advance," she announces in her introduction,

that the aim of my discussion is not to provide an answer *once and for all* to the question of 'radical' film criticism and practice. Nor do I want to participate in the kind of male academic jockeying that so often characterizes such undertakings. Having been identified (indirectly) in Lippe and Wood's preface as being among those who would champion alternative films and videos 'which few have heard of,' I am all too wary of being instated as 'other' to a dominant *One*."

The reader of Ms. Marchessault's article has every reason to wonder (or so it seems to me) why it was that she chose to qualify the phrase "academic jockeying" with the adjective "male"; and why, too — if she is indeed "wary of being instated as 'other' to a dominant *One*" — she lacked the imagination, or the conscience, to anticipate a similar wariness in her colleagues. Throughout her essay she systematically and deliberately misrepresents the points of view with which she disagrees; changes arguments which she cannot answer into arguments which she can; maintains that her interlocutors hold positions which they patently do not; evades the issues with which she purports to deal while encouraging her audience to believe that she is resolutely confronting them; promotes her own "answer *once and for all* to the question of 'radical' film criticism and practice" through the travesty of opinions which she does not like but to which she cannot reply in their unexpurgated form; and indicts the objects of her polemic — who write, explicitly, as socialists — on the ground that they are apologists of "the great tradition of Reaction" and advocates of total complicity with the dominant culture of late 20th century capitalism. Of course, this is all Ms. Marchessault *could* do; her essay suggests that she has no other methods at her disposal: but a writer who makes use of these methods in so unprincipled and unscrupulous a way should devote as much of the time and energy that she can spare to seeking out some other term than "academic jockeying" to apply to writers who reach conclusions which fail to coincide with her own — particularly if she is concerned (as Ms. Marchessault claims that she

is) to bring "to light . . . the expression of difference — and through its very possibility: the incitement for *collective change*."

"Unprincipled and unscrupulous": these are harsh words, but it would be difficult to find a more appropriate description of the kinds of strategy which Ms. Marchessault deploys in her essay. Consider for example, this:

Britton's assertion that 'the autonomous struggles of women, blacks and gays' cannot be reduced to class struggle but will not be achieved without it (p. 8), is all too familiar. . . . Britton's critique recalls Perry Anderson's swift dismissal of post-structuralism in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1984) (Equally striking in both Britton and Anderson is their *benign* insinuation that, while important, 'other' struggles (the feminist movement in particular) are somewhat diffuse and by no means have the collective force of organized labour. But where Anderson is kind enough to allow for the possibility of a socialist movement which is 'plural in composition,' Britton insists on his orthodoxy: above all else class struggle — we'll take care of the 'other' oppressions later . . . Once again we are up against the Great Either (traditional Marxism)/Or (Stalinism: postmodern politics) — with nothing in between."

Ms. Marchessault is referring, in her habitual manner, to the section of my essay in which I argue — with reference to the "post-Marxism" of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and essays by Stanley Aronowitz and Craig Owens — that "the construction of the category of postmodernity" in the work of these writers "subverts the construction of alibis for the repudiation of Marxism"; that these alibis characteristically take the form of a claim (evidently spurious) that historical materialism is indistinguishable from some form or other of bourgeois ideology; that the authors' identification of "the new social movements" as substitutes for a bankrupt, superannuated and politically quiescent working-class is unintelligible and opportunistic, automatically discredited by the parody of Marxism which accompanies it; and that the real political logic of "postmodern politics" is betrayed by the fact that their proponents can only affirm "the new social movements" at all by reducing their programmes to demands which can be met within class society — that is to say, in a society which remains capitalist.

Ms. Marchessault, naturally, ignores this argument. She prefers to accuse me of bad faith, and drawing on all her considerable resources of pious umbrage, she informs the readers of *CineAction!*, as a matter of fact, that "under the guise of protecting 'the new social movements' against those postmodern theorists who would use them merely to avoid the *real* struggle," Andrew Britton is *actually* (and, it would seem duplicitously) saying that "the autonomous struggles of blacks and gays" are not "real" struggles, and that so far from being a political priority, resistance to the oppression of these groups can be safely postponed until after the class struggle has been won. This charge bears no relation whatever to anything I believe or anything I have written, in *CineAction!* or elsewhere, and the freedom with which Ms. Marchessault makes it represents a failure of responsibility rather more serious than that implied by her indifference to the substance of my views on the modern movement. I wrote (let me remind her) as a gay man, and I made this fact explicit in my article. I also made it clear that I object to "postmodern politics" on the ground, not that they distract us from the class struggle, but that they reduce "the new social movements" to what I called a "rhetorical convenience," the function of which is to give a radical gloss to the reactionary, incredible and (one might have thought) thoroughly discred-

dited project of turning capitalism into socialism through a gradual process of "democratic" reform. Ms. Marchessault has the right to disagree with this characterisation of Stanley Aronowitz, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and should she ever have anything to say on the subject I will be very happy to listen to her. In the meantime, and for the present, she should bear in mind that it is grossly improper to falsify other people's political convictions in public and to bluster one's way through an article for which one cannot muster a single coherent idea by implying that one's antagonist is a misogynist. I will not go so far as to respond in kind and say that this passage in Ms. Marchessault's essay is patently homophobic; and since she has already accused me of conflating postmodern politics and Stalinism (in the course of evading the point I made about the politics of "popular fronts"), I will not reveal to her where the practice of discrediting socialist activists by calling them fascists originated. However, I will permit myself the remark that her readiness to overlook (let us say) the fact that I wrote precisely as a participant in one of those "other struggles" whose political value I am supposed to deny, and then, having overlooked it, to go on to represent me as a zealous advocate of the sexual values by which both gays and women are oppressed, gives ample ground for the most dismal speculation about what the "politics of difference," as "brought to light" by her, would, in practice, amount to.

Still, I must say, I suppose, that if I sin, I sin in good company:

"In the cinema there are many traditions . . . (and) sometimes 'smaller' traditions are excluded by a criticism which seeks to invest itself with the phallic authority of a 'Great Tradition.' Blind to the assumptions that construct it, such a criticism cannot help but reinforce and perpetuate, precisely by exclusion, the privilege historically accorded to that *unicum* which is Man in his purest expression. The examples that Britton provides as 'instances' of classical Hollywood cinema share characteristics beyond those of their viability (*sic*) as high modernist works. *Pyscho*, *Written on the Wind*, *While the City Sleeps*, *Blonde Venus*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *Gaslight* — all happen to have been made by white, European and male directors, with the sole exception of *Gaslight* by George Cukor — white, American and male (and homosexual. - A.B.). The question is, as Lippe and Wood point out, "a matter of emphasis."

I am a little surprised that Ms. Marchessault thought this worth printing in a journal with pretensions to being taken seriously, but I am absolutely astonished that her antipathy to white male foreigners is not indulged with more consistency and point. The case of Arthur Kroker and Michael Dorland I can understand: though they are male and (I will assume) white, their national origins exempt them from Ms. Marchessault's anathema. But what of Benjamin, Adorno, Derrida and Brecht? — white to a man, and not a Canadian amongst them; and what, too, of Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Tretyakov and Mayakovsky? — a group of names which comes perilously close to infecting Ms. Marchessault's thesis with the blight of "phallic authority." What has M. Baudrillard got that Josef von Sternberg hasn't? — and how is it possible to object to the great directors of the Hollywood cinema, but not the members of the Frankfurt School, on the basis of unfortunate characteristics which, in fact, Hitchcock and Adorno have in common? The answer, of course, is that Baudrillard and Adorno are sanctioned currency-values in left-wing academic circles, and that in these same circles the proposition that Sternberg and Hitchcock are great modern artists is regarded as self-evidently ridiculous. This is, we

must agree, some kind of a reason, just as Hank Quinlan was "some kind of a man," but it is not a sufficiently good reason to justify the uses to which the language of feminism is put in Ms. Marchessault's article. Sexual politics are not the continuation of slander by other means, and when I advance the claims that I do for Sirk, Sternberg and the rest, I am no more investing myself with the authority of patriarchy or "privileging Man in his purest essence" than Ms. Marchessault is when she appeals to Derrida and Arthur Kroker to show how wrong I am.

Difference or revolution?

As for my alleged "traditional Marxism" or "orthodoxy," I do indeed believe that in a class society the social form of all other kinds of oppression is determined by class. This does not mean that the class struggle has ethical priority over organised political resistance to the oppression of women or gays or blacks, and it most certainly does not mean that one fights the class struggle first and "takes care of the 'other' oppressions later": in that the various forms of oppression will be found, in practice, to co-exist, such a strategy makes little sense from a Marxist (as opposed to a reformist) point of view. However, my orthodoxy *does* entail the conviction that under the conditions of late 20th century capitalism, the oppression of women, gays and blacks cannot be eliminated without the abolition of capitalism — unless, of course, one is prepared to limit the demands of "the new social movements" to those which capitalism would be prepared to meet. This is what I say in my article, as Ms. Marchessault will discover if she takes the trouble to read it. No gay man who has experienced the age of AIDS would maintain that the struggle to secure elementary democratic rights within capitalist society is anything but fundamental, but the very fact that this struggle is necessary tells us nothing more than that capitalist "democracy" is primitive and that it remains, as it has always been, largely formal. While capitalism survives, the oppressed can aspire to little more than holding their ground. It is possible, of course, to make important local gains, but even if it were not the case that capitalism has never made a concession for which it cannot compensate and that it has never conceded the fundamental 'concessions' at all (after centuries of struggle, the working-class has still not secured the right to equal pay for equal work), these gains have always been confined to the populations of the capitalist democracies themselves, which continue to depend, in Marx's phrase, on "slavery, pure and simple, in the New World." It seems to me that the abolition of capitalism and imperialism is the precondition of the abolition of other forms of oppression on a world scale. We know, of course, as I say in my article, that anti-capitalist revolution does not guarantee the emancipation of women, gays and ethnic minorities, which is why the struggle against sexual and racial oppression is (or ought to be) on the agenda of revolutionary socialism, but I remain quite incapable of understanding how this struggle can be won, or even prosecuted beyond a certain fairly elementary point, in the context of an international class society.

That is why I am so suspicious of Ms. Marchessault when she talks about "the radical transformation of capitalism," and quotes with approval from Teresa de Lauretis to the effect that "the notion of gender . . . cannot be simply accommodated into the pre-existing, ungendered (or male-gendered) categories by which the official discourses on race and class have been elaborated." That the category of gender is different from the categories of race and class and cannot

be assimilated to them no one will dispute who has graduated from Semantics 101: but what are "the official discourses on race and class?" — Marx? Hitler? Malcolm X? Professor Rushton? Rosa Luxembourg? General Pinochet? Hayek? Emma Goldman? — and what more significant point do we make when we say that the category of 'gender' is 'un-classed'? The categories are different, and it would be foolish to expect either that they will cease to be different or that they can be related to one another without some kind of conscious intellectual effort. But to go on to imply that works in which the categories of race and class are used can be lumped together under the rubric "official discourses"; and then to imply, further, that these categories are not 'ungendered' at all, but 'male-gendered,' and that the various "official discourses" therefore express the interests simply of men — this is to make a conceptual leap which would offend against standards very much more lax than those which Ms. Marchessault employs elsewhere in her own essay.

If I am, as I say, suspicious, it is because Ms. Marchessault's demonstration, or endorsement, of the judgment that class is a male-gendered category is immediately followed by the claim that

the radical transformation of capitalism, of its social relations, cannot take place separately from the transformation of patriarchal society.

What does this actually mean? Does "radical transformation" signify "elimination"? If it does, why doesn't Ms. Marchessault say so? If it doesn't, what does she mean by "the transformation of patriarchal society"? Does she think that the realisation of the feminist programme is compatible with the survival of class or doesn't she? It is impossible to tell: Ms. Marchessault is studiously silent. Given her strategic misrepresentation of my own political position and her professed belief in "official discourses" on class, and granted the assumption (which might, I suppose, be wrong) that she would like to make out a case for postmodern politics but doesn't know how, I will risk the guess that she is indeed saying that capitalism can be in some mysterious way reformed and that at some future date a modified class society (radically modified, of course!) and the demands of the new social movements will be miraculously reconciled. My sense that the risk does not involve me in adventures too wildly improbable is confirmed by the banality of Ms. Marchessault's final gesture:

What must be written is what has so often been excluded by capitalist culture and its critical apparatuses; what must be brought to light is the expression of difference — and through its very possibility: the incitement for collective change.

Is this anything more than basic, late-20th-century, downtown-Toronto/New York/Paris/London/Harvard high-brow cliché?

FOOTNOTES

1. Thus it is absolutely characteristic of Marx to attribute *theoretical* value to Shakespeare's analysis of money and property relations in *Timon of Athens*, and to add that Shakespeare knows more about these subjects than "our theorising petty bourgeois" (*The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur: International Publishers, New York 1977, p. 102). And Engels writes to Margaret Harkness: "even in economic details (for instance, the re-arrangement of real and personal property after the Revolution), I have learned more (from Balzac) than from all the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together." Engels goes on to argue that although "Balzac was politically a Legitim-

ist," his own "class sympathies and political prejudices" do not in any way detract from the radical critical force of his novels, and that Balzac's greatness is continuous with his ability to transcend and repudiate these sympathies and prejudices in his art (*Marxists on Literature: an Anthology*, ed. David Craig: Penguin, G.B. 1977, pp. 270-71). Engels, of course, was not primarily a literary critic, but this aside, — which is similar in character to Marx's comments on Charlotte Bronte, Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell — is infinitely more sophisticated, and infinitely more profitable, than anything produced by our theorising petty bourgeois on the subject of the bourgeois artist and ideology in the last two decades. **One notes with interest that Freud was also of the opinion that the great art of the past had critical and cognitive, as opposed merely to symptomatic, value. The "cultural theorist" who has seen through the art-work is a comparatively recent phenomenon which seems to me to be fairly obviously correlated with the emergence of cultural theory as a bourgeois profession.**

2. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*: Gotham Library, New York 1960, p. 7.
3. *ibid.*
4. See "The Americanness of American Literature" and "The Complex Fate" in F. R. Leavis, *'Anna Karenina' and other Essays*: Chatto & Windus, London 1967.
5. *ibid.*, p. 155.
6. The parallels between Leavis and Adorno are plain enough, though on the other hand the comparison is, in my view, decidedly to Leavis's advantage: he is the more complex, the more suggestive and, for all his professed anti-Marxism, the more radical thinker. There is no room to argue this contention here: but I will suggest that for all the shared Hegelian elements, Leavis's epistemology, and his actual procedures as a critic, are very much closer to materialism than Adorno's are. It is also significant that Leavis was intensely hostile to the notion of *kunst* (which is what Adorno advocates, in an unusually strenuous form) and that he has a very much more nuanced — and more historical! — concept of the literary or cultural market. Leavis, of course, is not commonly thought of as being a theorist at all, no doubt because the theory is almost invariably embodied in the analysis of concrete works and seldom signified as *bona fide* ratiocination.
7. Alan Rudolph's nasty little film *The Moderns*, which was released shortly after the publication of my essay on postmodernism and which may reasonably be described as a representative late '80s art movie (the unwashed masses stayed away in droves), provides telling and depressing evidence of the extent to which this view of the past has become *de rigueur* in works which address themselves to an educated clientele. The film sets out to demonstrate that the great modern artists were frauds, charlatans, dilettantes and poseurs, and the key scene — in which the John Lone character, with the film's approval, tells us that our sense of the greatness of Cezanne and Modigliani is the product of a public relations exercise by highbrow snobs and art dealers, and proceeds to destroy two of their canvasses — ought to be recognised as a *locus classicus* of the postmodern discourse on artistic value.
8. *Leon Trotsky on Literature and Art*: Pathfinder Press, New York 1970, p. 88.
9. *ibid.*, p. 157.
10. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*: New Left Books, London 1973, pp. 17-18. This hodge-podge of Benjamin's favourite artists also includes Calderon and Shakespeare.
11. Tretyakov co-authored a standard attack on Trotsky (maintaining, falsely, that Trotsky and Lenin disagreed on the question of 'proletarian culture') in the course of Stalin's campaign against the Left Opposition.
12. Given Ms. Marchessault's antipathy to the United States, it would be interesting to have her comments on Baudrillard's latest volume, in which he discovers the joys of going on the road (with a suitable income) in America.
13. "AIDS does not exist apart from the practices that conceptualize it, represent it, and respond to it" (Douglas Crimp, *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*: US 1988). Is this an example of the use of deconstruction as a "political tool" which addresses something other than "signifying representations"? — and if it does, should we not be on the look-out for something more political?

Perna to Marchessault

I am writing this in response to "The Critic's Choice: Things Great and not so Great" by Janine Marchessault. I should begin by saying that I cannot respond to all of the points made by Ms. Marchessault as that in itself would require almost an entire issue of *CineAction!* I am going to confine myself therefore, to only those issues and opinions in the article that I found personally offensive.

Overall, I find the article less disagreeable (though it is that) than almost totally incoherent. (In fact, it borders on being unreadable.) As an illustration, let's take a look at section one: "The Great Tradition of Either/Or." In this opening segment, Ms. Marchessault responds to Robin Wood and Richard Lippe through a total misrepresentation of what they actually say. Ms. Marchessault interprets this passage,

We [referring to four members of the collective that form a close knit group in terms of critical practice] do not in the least reject . . . the various forms of 'alternative' cinema . . . they are necessary interventions that challenge the hegemony of a dominant practice which, by their nature, they cannot hope to displace or replace within any foreseeable future. Nor are we opposed to the inclusion in *CineAction!* of articles on such areas of filmmaking. It is all a matter of emphasis. Our first interest is in the general movement of our own culture during the past century and we are therefore primarily concerned with investigating the films most people have access to . . . (CineAction! 13/14, p. 2)

as,

The question of *CineAction!*'s "emphasis is posed in Lippe's and Wood's 'Policy and Politics' as a question of either/or: Either classical Hollywood cinema . . . or alternative forms of film and video . . ." (CineAction! 15, p. 9)

In fact, Wood and Lippe explicitly do not pose the question as either/or. They let it be known, in quite clear terminology, that this is their own critical emphasis. However, Ms. Marchessault is not content with merely repudiating

Wood's and Lippe's position; she takes it personally: "I am all too wary of being instated as 'other' to a dominant One." (CineAction! 15, p. 8) Ms. Marchessault sets herself up as the single target of an insidious campaign to discredit her.

However, her wrath is directed not only at Wood and Lippe; the major focus of her rage is Andrew Britton, whom she also does the service of misrepresenting. Take, as one small example, her dismissal of Britton's assertion that "without an anti-capitalist revolution the goals of the black, gay, and women's movements . . . will not be achieved" (CineAction! 13/14, p. 8-9). That is, as the oppression of blacks, gays, and women is guaranteed within the structures of patriarchal capitalism, only with the abolishment of said political/economic system can a successful democratic state exist. She interprets his argument as, ". . . above all else class struggle — we'll take care of the other oppressions later . . ." (CineAction! 15, p. 11) and thus, can conclude triumphantly: "The radical transformation of capitalism, of its social relations, cannot take place separately from the transformation of patriarchal society" (ibid) as if the point were her own.

In fact, Ms. Marchessault misrepresents Mr. Britton quite consistently throughout the article. (It is perhaps the only consistent thing in the article.) However, I will leave it to Mr. Britton to respond to her criticisms.

I would rather instead move on to two other assertions that Ms. Marchessault makes that provoked my ire. The first concerns the recent work of Godard which is, according to Ms. Marchessault, "profoundly negative in a modern sense." She goes on to explain that "the extreme negativity of [his] hermetic works reveals an anti-thesis: the desire and the hope for a better future." (CineAction! 15, p. 11-12). The implication that the homophobia of *Sauve qui peut*, the sexism of *Je vous salue, Marie*, and the misogyny of *Prenom: Carmen* are somehow indicative of Godard's "hope for a better future" is profoundly disturbing, especially since it is implied by a (professed) radical film critic. Perhaps Ms. Marchessault has not heard that Jean-Luc "the East Wind prevails over the West Wind"

Godard is now directing 30 second commercials for trendy French jeans on television. Godard's recent work is less "profoundly negative" than "profoundly capitalist" and is far less radical (or even liberal) than Ms. Marchessault leads us to believe.

The second point involves what might be called Ms. Marchessault's trump card: the fact that *Psycho*, *Written on the Wind*, *While the City Sleeps*, *Blonde Venus*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, *Letter from an Unknown Woman*, and *Gaslight* have all been made by white, European and male directors (in Cukor's case "white, American, and male"): that this somehow discredits their work; and that this somehow discredits the critic's work if he or she happens to admire such films. May I be the first to point out to Ms. Marchessault that most of the names she quotes approvingly of throughout the article are also white, European, and male: Bertolt Brecht, Karl Marx, Walter Benjamin, Barthes, Derrida, even Mr. Godard himself. Many others are white, male and Russian: Trotsky, Meyerhold, Eisenstein, Tretyakov, and Mayakovsky. May I also point out that two of those white, European male directors (Lang and Sirk) were not only influenced by but also worked with Brecht. Most disturbing for me, however, is her dismissal of Cukor, "white, American, and male." Cukor is indeed white, American, and male but he is also gay — a fact that has a great influence on his best works. I find it extremely suspicious that Ms. Marchessault chooses to ignore this fact. One of the most damaging forms of homophobia is "invisibility": pretending that gay people and their problems don't exist. Ms. Marchessault lays herself wide open to this charge with her championing of Godard's work as "the hope for a better future" and her omission of Cukor's gayness.

I could go on enumerating the many contradictions and evasions propounded by Ms. Marchessault but the point is I don't have to. What I've demonstrated already is that Ms. Marchessault invalidates her own arguments. She discards seven films because they were made by white male directors yet she quotes approvingly white male writers. She discards three critics through a blatant misreading of them. And she champions as progressive

works that are not only negative but reactionary. Is this what Ms. Marchessault believes radical criticism entails?

Scott Perna

Marchessault to Britton

will be brief.

While I appreciate the many hours that must have gone into your frustrated preamble, I must state in my own "inimitable" way that I lack the patience for most of it. It seems to me that this "debate" has been played out in a more productive way, years ago in a different socio-historic setting. The famous pre-structuralist/post-structuralist debates between *Movie* and *Screen* may indeed help us understand the pompous dressing of your interminable reply. The attempt to revive these debates within an economy of terms not even my own, however, leaves me puzzled.

In my original response to your article I never suggest the possibility of a "pure" revolutionary culture as you imply. Nor do I simply equate "dominant culture with Hollywood and cultural resistance with the avant-garde." You may recall that this is precisely the sort of oppositional paradigm I was reacting against (please see my reply to Scott Perna for more on this). This same paradigm is reproduced not only in your original essay (classical Hollywood cinema versus postmodern culture) but in your response to me. That you lack the imagination to come up with little more than the most obtuse list of Canadian experimental filmmakers — who would not even describe their own work as "alternative" — to characterize the films I would "probably champion" only adds to my bewilderment: who are you arguing with? (And I am the one accused of misrepresentation?)

Contrary to your '80s law and order decree I do believe that I can distinguish (not "assert") Adorno's definition of high modernism from yours "on page nine"; draw your attention to Brecht and Benjamin's utopian conception (which I ground historically) of popular culture "on page ten"; "concede" (to whom?) that Hollywood is not reducible to the culture industry "on page eleven"; all the while acknowledging that the problem that faces artists today is the relation between culture and commodity using Schoenberg as an example of the institutionalization of cultural resistance.

The point of all this is: CONTRADICTION — how do you escape the marketplace? How do you produce culture outside of capitalism when there is no position free of its contradictions. So when you ask: "which of these horses does Ms. Marchessault wish to back?" I can only respond (yet again) that we have to think beyond jockeying, beyond centres and margins. (For a more in depth discussion of false consciousness and culture see Sylvia Harvey's *May '68 and Film Culture*). In this sense, your declaration that the site of "cultural struggle is no longer the bourgeois art-gallery or the concert hall but the culture of the market place" is particularly confusing given that the bourgeois art gallery and the concert hall are, and were always, part of the culture of the market place. (Even the dreaded Adorno "concedes" to this in his conception of autonomous art.) If our task is to "plan and debate strategies for intervening in this (?) culture" then we have to begin by defining our terms.

Your initial argument in "The Myth of Postmodernism" (against Jameson) that bourgeois culture is not a unified whole responding to an evenly imposed post-industrial state is, I think, crucial to any historical material analysis of culture. What I fail to understand is how, after belabouring this point, you can maintain that all contemporary bourgeois culture and its audiences are anathema to real political struggle ("Myth," p. 16). What contemporary bourgeois (postmodern?) culture — besides Godard and some New York photographers — are you referring to? The SanKofa collective? Alexander Kluge? Yvonne Rainer? Omar Artur? Micheline Lanctot? Chris Marker? Lisa Eisner? Chantal Akerman? Sophie Bailargeon? Atom Egoyan? Spike Lee? Bruce LaBruce? Specification is usually where rigorous analysis begins.

What continues, for me, to be a crucial part of this specification is understanding the relation between pleasure and cognition. When I wrote my original reply to you I was thinking in particular of Terry Lovell's discussion of pleasure in *Pictures of Reality*:

The pleasures of a text may be grounded in pleasures of an essentially public and social kind. For instance, pleasures of common experiences identified and celebrated in art, and through this celebration, given recognition and validation; pleasures of solidarity to which this sharing may give rise; pleasure in shared and

socially defined aspirations and hopes; in a sense of identity and community . . . Like the desires of the unconscious, they are not in themselves either progressive or reactionary; but a political aesthetics, which marxist aesthetics must be, ignores this dimension at its peril. (p. 59)

My original reply sought to introduce some new terms into your cursory and binary summary of something called postmodern politics and post-modern culture. I wanted to suggest that a national film culture or a feminist culture or any culture that arises from community might in fact carry real possibilities for social change.

Unfortunately, I can see our exchanges going on and on: not debating but restating, name-calling: "why you unprincipled, unscrupulous" . . . restating . . . "oh, that's so cliché" . . . reinstating. Each time the implications will grow heavier, the moral wrath stronger and the self-amplification grander: now I'm not only opposed to your interpretation of postmodern politics but to Trotsky *tout court* — an ideological leap that takes my breath away: "Trotsky and I on the picket lines . . .", "Trotsky and I, indeed, against Marchessault — who will win?" What ever happened to historical materialism?

So now to your Trotsky's kidney bean I must find a good quote from "Marx on Ireland," all the while weighing the odds, considering the risk: am I imbuing my argument with a phallic thrust that could work against me in the next round? This is male (or what I like to call phallo-empirico-logico) academic jockeying. It is academic in the worst sense.

What are the issues here? Where and how do we begin the struggle against capitalism, against patriarchy? It seems to me we have to start somewhere . . . local struggles (shared experiences, community) can lead to a larger coalition politic.

Marchessault to Perna

Like Andrew Britton, you insist from the outset that my article is "almost totally incoherent" and "borders on unreadable" (thank you for the "almost" and "borders"). Aside from your benign paternalism (an overfamiliar strategy that by now has worn thin on most women), I was particularly

astonished by the narrow and short-sighted focus of your reply.

The quote that you include from Richard Lippe and Robin Wood's preface only validates my original point which you seem to have misread. I am not concerned with whether Lippe and Wood are kind enough not to "object" to articles "on such areas of filmmaking." Their argument (which was related not simply to personal taste but to the direction — emphasis — of this magazine) sets up a misleading binarism between films we all have access to and films and videos most have little chance of seeing. We either see it or we don't — get it? (This is a binarism that I'm particularly sensitive to.) The question I raised is: Who are "WE" or what constitutes "most"? There are many different communities that make up that "WE" and some of those communities do have access to certain films and videos that are not necessarily part of the Great Tradition in cinema that Lippe and Wood describe. The films of Micheline Lanctôt, Mireille Dansereau, Paule Baillargeon, Léa Pool and Anne-Claire Poirier for example are at least familiar to some Canadian and most Quebec audiences. Many feminists have been profoundly influenced by them. So while perhaps they do not overtly displace dominant patriarchal culture, their effect has been deeply felt by many of us — and in turn this has had the effect of strengthening and mobilizing our movements.

In order to challenge the constricting paradigms through which culture is thought, complex hegemonies should not be reduced to one dominant cinema and its various alternatives. Otherwise, women directors, among others, will always suffer the margins.

By the way, in reference to your "as if the point were her own," I claim no ownership over my ideas — ideas hopefully are not owned but put to good use. However, I should draw your attention to the fact that the point in question, the one that lets me "triumphantly conclude" (??? this terminology belongs to your economy not mine) was prefaced by a quote from Teresa deLauretis which warns against conflating patriarchy and capitalism. This is the danger that I located in Britton's essay (and now in your letter). The abolition of capitalism does not guarantee the abolition of patriarchy. For more on this, see deLauretis' *Tech-nologies of Gender* (1987).

As far as male white European theorists are concerned, I must confess some of them are quite useful. My

favourites at present all begin with "B": Brecht, Benjamin and Barthes — though in my article I don't actually "quote approvingly" from Barthes as you infer. (Perhaps you've got him confused with Baudrillard which is perfectly understandable given that my article was unreadable and their names both begin with "B"). As to their overwhelming presence in my article, you may have missed the part near the beginning of my introduction where I state that I want to respond to Lippe and Wood's preface as well as to Britton's article. Britton's article irritated me in particular since it dismissed and conflated so many of those 'poststructuralist/postmodern' theorists that were, in different and sometimes contradictory ways, tied to the development of feminist film theory and practice in the '70s and '80s. So while I support some of his criticisms, I tried to open up what I perceived as a fairly narrow discussion of that theoretical terrain. How does the saying go: let's not throw the baby out with the bath water . . .

Yes, I've heard that Godard is making jeans commercials (you must know this is not the first time he's directed commercials??). Does this mean we should discount the last thirty years of his films, his work in video and all his writings? In some ways this would be a great relief for many of us women who always felt torn between his radical critique of capitalist culture, his exploration of new narrative forms and his growing obsession with bare breasted young girls among other things. Nonetheless, while I've always found certain aspects of Godard's work 'problematic,' (what interesting filmmaker isn't?) he continues to be important for the same reason that Yvonne Rainer is: both are concerned with analyzing/foregrounding the *contradictions* of his/her own desires within capitalist culture. The censorship issue within the feminist community, which I'm sure you're familiar with, was and continues to be painful for precisely these reasons: what is a "good" image of sexuality? What would a non-sexist non-patriarchal representation of sex look like? While I did not "champion" (another nice expression) Godard as our "hope for a better future," I did try to challenge Britton's view of Godard (a postmodern trendy who "flatters his audience") by pointing to the utopian aspects underlying his films: *his* hope or belief in the possibility of a better future. (For an interesting discussion of *Sauf qui peut* and pornography see

Constance Penley's new book: *The Future Of An Illusion*.)

The fact that Cukor is gay is well taken. The film canon to which he belongs is not simply homogeneous but is made up of differences which need to be recognized and elaborated. This I believe is what Lippe and Wood argue in their preface: "Hollywood cinema has not been adequately accounted for." This statement, you might recall, I agreed with. However, I also stated that for a magazine this *emphasis* is narrow because it excludes so many races, nationalities and women. Moreover, it sees these exclusions as invisible alternatives. *Visibility* of differences is precisely what I was arguing for.

Rickman to Morrison

Gee-e-e-sh! I write one modest little letter (*CineAction!* 13/14) commenting, in part, on one modest little film I felt to have been immoderately praised (in Susan Morrison's "Getting a Fix on the '60s: Philip Kaufman's *The Wanderers* Revisited," *CineAction!* 12), and awake, come *CineAction!* 15, to find myself infamous. Specifically, in Morrison's "'Just What the Hell is Rickman Trying to Say?' Some Remarks on Critical Method and Critical Controversy," I find myself, or a caricature of myself, the "self-styled gatekeeper" of an imaginary "canon" of great films, a concept "hopelessly out-of-date in the late '80s," but one for which I bear the brunt, "in a reduced way," of a good deal of colorful opprobrium. Complete with banner headline! Now I know how Charles Foster Kane felt when he opened up his morning paper and read "Candidate Kane Caught in Love Nest." If I am co-habiting with Clement Greenberg, shouldn't somebody tell him?

I would like to extricate myself from these scandalous surroundings. But to do so I must unpack the baggage Morrison has stuck me with, for when dealing with critics who attack "the intent of (one's) letter rather than its content" — an "intent" that for the most part Morrison invents — any attempt to just use a sheet and climb out the window will likely just hang me up more. In replying to Morrison's article I must be careful, then, to separate what I really believe from the dirty laundry Morrison discerns. Or, rather, make a four part distinction: What I Believe, What I Said, What a Reasonable Person Could Infer

I Believe From What I Said, and, finally, what Susan Morrison says I believe.

This takes some patience. Let us deal with Morrison's biggest distortion first. The little ones, while pernicious, will take care of themselves once I nail the big one. Thus:

I am not a "self-styled gatekeeper" of any imagined, universal canon of great films.

I do believe that there is a shared, universal canon in film studies, films that are central to discussion and debate about cinema. It is constantly evolving, in different directions, as writers about film shift and reshift their priorities.

It was out of battles over what would be included in that canon that the *politique des auteurs* emerged; that study of, say, Hitchcock became respectable; that, more recently, women's cinema and minority cinema have been foregrounded. To deny that there is a canon which structures film studies would be absurd.¹

My one reference in my original letter to this concept came in a parenthetical wish that *The Wanderers* not "find a place in the canon it doesn't deserve." It was to the "official" canon that used to be made up of *Bicycle Thief* and *8 1/2*, that centered around *Vertigo* and *San-sho Dayu* in "classical" auteurist practice, which seems to have relocated around *Dance, Girl, Dance* and *Jeanne Dielman* in the later '70s and of late seems to be headed in the "post-modernist" direction of *Pee Wee's Big Adventure* that I intended reference, although it is certainly conceivable that an intelligent reader might think I was instead referring to an historical "body of cinematic masterpieces." Were I to rewrite my original letter I would clarify this point, and make clear that I'm not crazy about the concept of the official canon in any form — even when I recognize, as I do, its seeming inevitability. Or agree with the inclusion within it of one film or another.

For I do hold, with Robin Wood and many of this magazine's other contributors, that making discriminations between films is a worthwhile task. Surely this is what Morrison was doing when she rated, in her original piece, *The Wanderers* as better than *American Graffiti*. I do not wish to recapitulate the writings of Wood, Britton, Lippe and others here; they do a good job themselves, and rather than erect a straw man and label it "Rickman," as Morrison does, I think she'd be better advised to challenge their sort of canonical practice directly, as Janine Mar-

chessault does in her contribution to *CineAction!* 15.

Morrison's original article, I must admit, does not so much argue that *The Wanderers* is a great film (thus, implicitly, deserving a spot in the hallowed canon I'm supposed to champion) but merely that it is "exceptional" and that it deserves "a second chance in finding an audience." Commendable goals. I stand by the critique I made of the film, but, as Morrison says, that's not the real issue.² "The real issue here is one of methodology, 'his' against 'mine'."

I deny that the distortion Morrison presents of what I say in her critique of "canonical criticism" has much to do with either classical auteurist practice³ or my own methodology, which has evolved out of that practice in somewhat the same manner as Robin Wood's (although in a different direction, as articles I might write subsequent to this one will demonstrate). For one thing I'd like to think of myself as less exclusionary than the early *Cahiers du Cinéma* crowd. Morrison can be forgiven for seeing something of the Truffaut of "A Certain Tendency" in me. My desire to bar Kaufman's oddball epic from the official canon does seem a tad prescriptive. Mea culpa. To every viewer their own canon, say I; let a million pantheons arise.⁴ I have my tastes, based on beliefs about art and life and stuff. No doubt these beliefs are chock-a-block with "inherent biases and conceptual frameworks," but I know this; I do not think these beliefs were formed outside of history, nor do I assert that my Subjectivity is Objective.⁵

"At this point, Rickman might ask: 'What about objectivity?'" opines Morrison. Nay, nay, say I, Rickman will say no such thing. Rickman believeth not in the words Morrison puts in his mouth. Rickman explicitly disavows the following things Susan Morrison puts in his mouth:

"It is easy enough to untangle the underlying premise upon which Rickman's criticism is based. Above all else, he claims that a film must be worthy of critical attention, and by worthy he implies that it must be redeemable as a great work of art." No, any number of approaches are possible. Just the other day, as I write, I caught *My Stepmother is an Alien*, and while that film hardly obeys my "guidelines for achieving greatness," it would be fascinating to analyse the film at length for what it says about the ongoing conservative recuperation of a once challenging subgenre (the comic special effects film). In fact, I wish I was writing that article

now. There are many valid approaches to film study; personal, evaluative criticism is one of them. If that criticism is cognizant of the world outside the critic's mind, then so much the better.

"His criteria for achieving greatness (consist) of a close adherence to the classical unities of literary narrative, especially coherence within the text." Well, I do expect my narratives to be coherent, thank you very much, but if they don't "conform to the standard Hollywood rules of filmic form and order" (as, Morrison says, *The Wanderers* does not), I would like the resultant film fruitfully to challenge those rules. In my view *The Wanderers* does not provide such a challenge, but reasonable people can disagree. If my ideal films are as conservative as Morrison claims, how then could I like *Four Friends*, very much a troubled, divided, post-classical work?

"Under Rickman's guidelines, no non-narrative film, be it avant-garde, experimental or independent, could ever hope to find favour with him." This is utterly absurd. I would like to invite Morrison over to examine my life-size busts of such heroes of mine as Maya Deren, Bruce Conner, and Pat O'Neill; they're made of solid marble and I genuflect to them daily as I make my pilgrimage to the Sacred Fount of Michael Snow (one drink and you zoom across the room for forty minutes).

But seriously, folks, nothing I said should be construed as hostile to non-narrative film practices. Now, if Morrison was more on the ball, she might nail me with a footnote in Janet Staiger's piece pointing out how the criteria of "Romantic auteur criticism" are often applied to non-narrative cinema. And I would say, "Yup, that's right, dad-gummit." And I would add that my primary interest in film studies is investigating human creativity, in whatever form, and how it survives in a hostile world — excuse me, "social formation."

Nothing in my piece gives any credence to Morrison's claim that I believe the film canon that I do believe exists — either my individual one, or the "consensus" canon all who write about film participate in constructing on an ad hoc, continuing basis — either is "untouchable" or that it exists "to the exclusion and derision of all other films." Nor do I feel that "a film that is not worth canonizing is not worth writing about." I never said such a thing, or anything close to it. How badly can Morrison misread me? Does she dispute that *Four Friends*, or *River's Edge* — two films I praise — are "small (films), the ones

that take chances or appeal to limited audiences?" Even *American Graffiti* was considered a risk in its day.⁶

Having set me up for target practice and bashed away at me for a couple of pages, Morrison concludes the body of her piece with a flurry of rhetoric. Susan Morrison may, in her other work, be a paragon of ideal critical practice, but here, at least, while she talks a good game in favour of non-repressive criticism, "that allows for differences, that shuns the restrictions of canonical claims," I submit that the massive overkill she subjected my letter to indicates nothing less than a "repressive" attitude toward the "hopelessly out-of-date" criticism she discerns that I represent.⁷ I could close with a rhetorical flourish too: exploration of a film's meaning is a valuable pursuit; what the hell *everybody* is saying is important. And I believe this, I really do. But lest this chinfest drag on for several more issues of *CineAction!*, becoming as legendary in film circles as Sarris-Kael, Wood-Lovell, or, God help us all, Salt-Bordwell, let me conclude my side of this tiff by salvaging what I can from Morrison's very good question: "What is the purpose of an analysis/critique of a film?"

"Is it to establish once and for all an untouchable body of cinematic masterpieces?" No, but recognition of good work and individual expression, flourishing as it can in the unlikelyst of places, is something I personally seek.

"Is it to fix, once and for all, the meaning that the director intends us to get from watching the film?" No, but the attempt to fix a meaning can be a useful tool in analysing our reactions (my reaction, the audience's reaction, a society's reaction) to a film.

Is it to elevate its director into an authorial pantheon of cinematic greats?" If we define "pantheon" not as a marbled sepulchre but as a warehouse full of valuable, distinctively individual works (bundled, here, by name) lying at hand for ready use, a warehouse of works, and careers, that remain "meaningful in the world" — yes, then. Sure. If I didn't think films — and criticism — was meaningful in the world, I wouldn't have bothered in the first place.

Notes

1. "That canons exist in film studies and that canon formation is involved with the political sphere is evident." Janet Staiger, "The Politics of Film Canons," *Cinema Journal* 24:3 (Spring 1985), 4-23. Staiger's article is the major piece to date on the topic, although I

differ with many of her assumptions and her conclusions. See also the replies to Staiger by J. Dudley Andrew and Gerald Mast (*Cinema Journal* 25:1, Fall 1985), and Virginia Wright Wexman's article in *Film Quarterly* (Spring 1986) on the canonization of *Vertigo* (another article with debatable premises and dubious conclusions.)

2. Morrison deals directly with but two of my criticisms. I think she might have a point about the film's attitude toward the boys' sexism. I still think Nina is a failure in characterization. I said what I meant when I called *The Wanderers* a failure as social history (in her first definition): it struck the wrong chord for me. But this is obviously just my opinion. If Morrison thinks I ever claimed omniscience, she is mistaken.
3. Morrison seems to be attacking a caricature of '50s *Cahiers*, '60s *Movie*, and Andrew Sarris as well as one of me. Whatever its faults, *The American Cinema* (for example) is still less of an example of "fetishized assertions" than, say, the *Screen* magazine of the '70s. Sarris' categories and commentaries were always more tentative than Morrison (and his other critics, like Staiger) think they were.
4. A democratic principle which does not, I think, necessarily imply a mass atomization of the audience, or preclude various progressive collective actions (lest I be deemed not "politically correct," an odious term Morrison employs with a seemingly straight face.)
5. My subjectivity has declared itself. Am I liberated yet?
6. This fact can be ascertained from Dale Pollock's Lucas biography, *Skywalking* (1983).
7. What's this "out-of-date" business? Is a theory true one year and "not with it" the next? Truth, whatever it is, doesn't follow fashion.

Greg Rickman
San Francisco

Morrison to Rickman

It is the policy at *CineAction!* to print letters from our readers which take on issues brought up in the articles we publish. As far as I am concerned, the Rickman rejoinder duly printed above requires little response since its cogency, let alone its tone of voice, is seriously questionable. While I look forward to debate which opens up issues related to film criticism, the Rickman rebuttal presents confusing argumentation which alternates between self-congratulatory and self-contradictory positions. There's no need for me to once again refute Rickman's original canonical claims (cf. *CineAction!* 13/14) since he does the task this time himself within the body of his text.

Harcourt to Wood

Once a perceptive critic, capable of sensitive responses to nuanced details of *mise en scene*, Robin Wood has become a mono-thematic ideological critic, seeking in all films evidence of his own particular ideological stance. Like Joe Gargery, the blacksmith in Dickens' *Great Expectations*, who, in spite of his illiteracy, loves to sit by the fire of an evening with a good book or a good newspaper, picking out those letters that reconfirm the presence of his own name; so Robin Wood browses through cinema looking for confirmations of his own personalized ideological position. Wood cannot be expected to see this position, of course, any more than fish can see the water they swim in. Nevertheless a position is there.

Always an idealist (even back in his humanist days), Wood has gradually shifted into an ideological position that, because vigorously opposed to the patriarchal capitalist system (the only ideology he can name), he thinks of as progressive. Wood's position, however, is actually reductive, universalist, and imperialist.

With a confidence encouraged by a British education and an addiction to Hollywood movies — two of the mightiest carriers of imperialist attitudes in the world today — Robin Wood and his followers have evolved an imperialistic ideological position that might be described by an outsider as a Hollywood-fixed, largely homophilic, so-called marxist-feminist position. For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to this position as the "hosomarxist" ideological position.

The hosomarxist ideological position dismisses everything in a film that is not politically correct from the hosomarxist point-of-view. Indeed, like Joe Gargery in *Great Expectations* who looks for a "J" and an "O" and then a "J-O, Joe" in everything he reads, the hosomarxists seeks in all cinema evidence of the same recurring, supposedly "progressive," "anti-patriarchal" sexual paradigm.

Condemned to thematic readings of individual works, this position is equally restricted in range to the most conventional narrative formulae within the most established of Hollywood genres — hardly a "progressive" subject-area but one that can, of course, be "problematised" and then "psychoanalysed"

from a hosomarxist point-of-view.

The hosomarxist position ignores experimental work and documentary work. It ignores the extra-cinematic inflections of ethnicity, economy, local gesture, and indigenous speech. It has never attempted to address the over-coded, over-fabulated cinema of Latin America; and, apparently, it is ill-equipped to address the under-coded, under-fabulated cinema of Australia, of Canada or of Quebec — of the British "colonies" in fact. Furthermore, it cannot handle — except with contempt — any individual filmic articulation that does not refer in some way to a Hollywood genre.

So in Wood's recent article in *CineAction!* No. 16 (May 1989), "Towards a Canadian (Inter)national Cinema," disgusting though the film is for Wood, *Un Zoo, la nuit* is at least partially redeemable because it is a little bit like a Hollywood film. Atom Egoyan's work, on the other hand, is handled with the insensitivity of imperialist condescension.

And yet, for someone not blinkered by this hosomarxist position, Egoyan's work represents an exceptional achievement. It is work, not of extraordinary range, but of extraordinary relevance and originality.

With their sense of ethnic displacement and of uncertain family affiliations, Egoyan's films are central to the cultural experience of many new Canadians in this country and, indeed, even of old Canadians as we witness the particularities of our culture being phased out through a combination of historical ignorance and corporate greed.

I have no intention of engaging with the reductive details of Wood's supercilious dismissal of *all* of Australian cinema and most of Canadian and Québécois cinema. What I wish to protest is more a matter of stance and tone.

A cultural identity is created by many sorts of social activities, but supremely by its cultural producers and by its artists. It seems to me (a phrase that Wood uses repeatedly, to simulate humility) that, far more than Canadian culture, it is the hosomarxist "revolutionary" activity that is merely "the wish of intellectuals."

Colonial culture, fragile though it be, is the product of all sorts of people thinking about the particularities of the spaces in which they live and about the rhythms of their individual and collective lives. Yes, it would be splendid if we could overthrow the increasingly consumerist world of late capitalism by hosomarxist intellectual activity. But the goal is a self-serving hosomarxist academic wish.

Decline of the American Empire actually tells us why. It has to do with numbers.

The first scene in this film, set in the vast corridors of a new university in Quebec, in the corridors of a university as shopping mall, there is talk about numbers. The blacks in Africa will win out, a voice is explaining, because there are sufficient numbers to enable them to win. In the United States, they may not. For blacks in the US at this moment, read Québécois!

In the closing scenes of the film, the sado-masochist visitor who services one of the unhappy women in this film leaves with her as a gift a historical text written by Michel Brunet, a separatist historian. It is as if the separatist movement in Quebec, as Arcand now sees it, had a sado-masochist dimension that was doomed to self-abuse and that led to the contrived superficialities that we see within the film.

These superficialities involve a gaggle of Québécois historians who, having been too late to partake of the master-narrative "imperialist" historiography of men like Spengler and Toynbee, know nothing of their own country and who live out their lives by having sex and baking fish — all part of the contemporary world of conspicuous consumption.

Finally, in *Decline*, there is an "additional photography" credit that speaks a world to those who know. The additional photography is by Jacques Leduc. While I don't know about this, I assume that Leduc is responsible for the final shot of the film, the country house in the snow — the Québécois winter landscape, freed from all these hopelessly defeated yet compassionate people.

This shot (and this credit) evokes a whole range of Québécois cultural achievement. "*Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver!*" sang Gilles Vigneault back in the 1960s. In the cinema, it is Jacques Leduc who, more than anyone, is associated with what has been called the "pastoral" tradition in Québécois cinema. It is virtually a Canadian genre. Films like *La chambre blanche*, by Jean Pierre Lefebvre; *La vraie nature de Bernadette*, by Gilles Carle; *Mon oncle Antoine*, by Claude Jutra; *J.A. Martin. Photographie*, by Jean Beaudin; *L'Hiver bleu*, by André Blanchard; and supremely, *La tendresse ordinaire*, by Jacques Leduc — these films define the boundaries of this distinctly Québécois cinematic tradition. Furthermore, films like *Drylanders*, by Donald Haldane; *Paperback Hero*, by

Peter Pearson; *The Rowdyman*, by Peter Carter (with Gordon Pinsent); and even, in their different ways, *Reason over Passion*, by Joyce Wieland; *Hart of London*, by Jack Chambers; and *La région centrale*, by Michael Snow — these films refer to this notion of the pastoral in English Canada.

Arcand has always been ambivalent about this tradition, invoking it in many of his films but deforming it by sexual violence and political corruption. He refers to it in *Decline* as if to acknowledge that it was part of the now relinquished separatist desire.

Wood knows nothing of this tradition and, if he knew about it, he wouldn't care. It doesn't reference his hosomarxist position. The "pastoral" has no equivalent in Hollywood culture. Its politics are not imperialist politics. It does not "universalize" the human condition. The pastoral is not an American genre.

In his general sense of futility, however, Wood is probably right: perhaps this concern less "to search for" than "to allow to develop" a Canadian identity while living in such proximity to the United States was "doomed to failure from the outset." In Canada, unlike the United States, there are not sufficient numbers; and throughout the vastness of this country, there has rarely been an agreed-upon national purpose.

For those of us who were involved in it, however, for those of us who live in Canada and who care about the distinctiveness of our cultures as they have been striving to articulate themselves over the years by presenting gentle alternatives to American cultural life, it seemed like a worthwhile activity at the time.

Perhaps from the hosomarxist position, the native-rights movements are equally futile and parochial; and perhaps too the Welsh and Scots have been silly all these years and the Irish particularly irrational. Perhaps they should all stop whining and get on with the basic business of being British!

Imperialist cultures can never be expected adequately to see the value of colonial cultures. Why should they? It is not in their own political self-interest. Like all imperialists, the hosomarxists feel themselves to be citizens of the world.

So hosomarxists, so Robin Wood — my valued friend of many years: trample on our flowers; throw away our songs. But don't expect the natives to enjoy it.

Peter Harcourt
Carlton University

Wood to Harcourt

I do not wish to respond to this painful letter at length or in detail. I would ask those interested only to re-read the article in *CineAction! 16* that provoked it and judge for themselves whether or not Peter's letter offers an adequate representation of my arguments — or, indeed, whether it makes any real contact with them at any point. I think I have more respect for Peter's position than he has for mine, and I am readier to attend to it respectfully. A few miscellaneous observations:

1. Peter is to be congratulated on his ingenuity in coining a term that manages to heap ridicule, simultaneously,

on the women's movement, the gay movement, and socialism; I recommend its immediate adoption by all the enemies of *CineAction!*

2. My article dealt with four recent films that have been hailed (largely at European film festivals) as constituting a Canadian film renaissance. I did not deal with earlier Canadian cinema (of which there is a sensitive and persuasive account in Peter's *Movies and Mythologies*), and my one reference to Québécois cinema was (implicitly) strongly positive. Of the four films I attacked, Peter seems prepared to defend only one (*Decline Of the American Empire*); this would appear to be the only one of his flowers on which I have trampled.

3. I was momentarily upset by the suggestion that my treatment of Egoyan

could be read as condescending, but on re-reading what I wrote I find this no more the case than it was the intention. I singled out Egoyan's work as deserving of the most respectful attention, while expressing certain very tentative reservations about it.

4. I am surprised that Peter feels that my position 'cannot handle — except with contempt — any individual filmic articulation that does not refer in some way to a Hollywood genre,' and that is 'restricted in range to the most conventional narrative formulae within the most established of Hollywood genres.' Does this constitute his dismissal of my recent work on *L'Atalante*, *Le Charme Discret de la Bourgeoisie*, *L'Amour Fou*, *Céline and Julie Go Boating*, *Raging Bull*, and *Heaven's Gate* (to name a few)?

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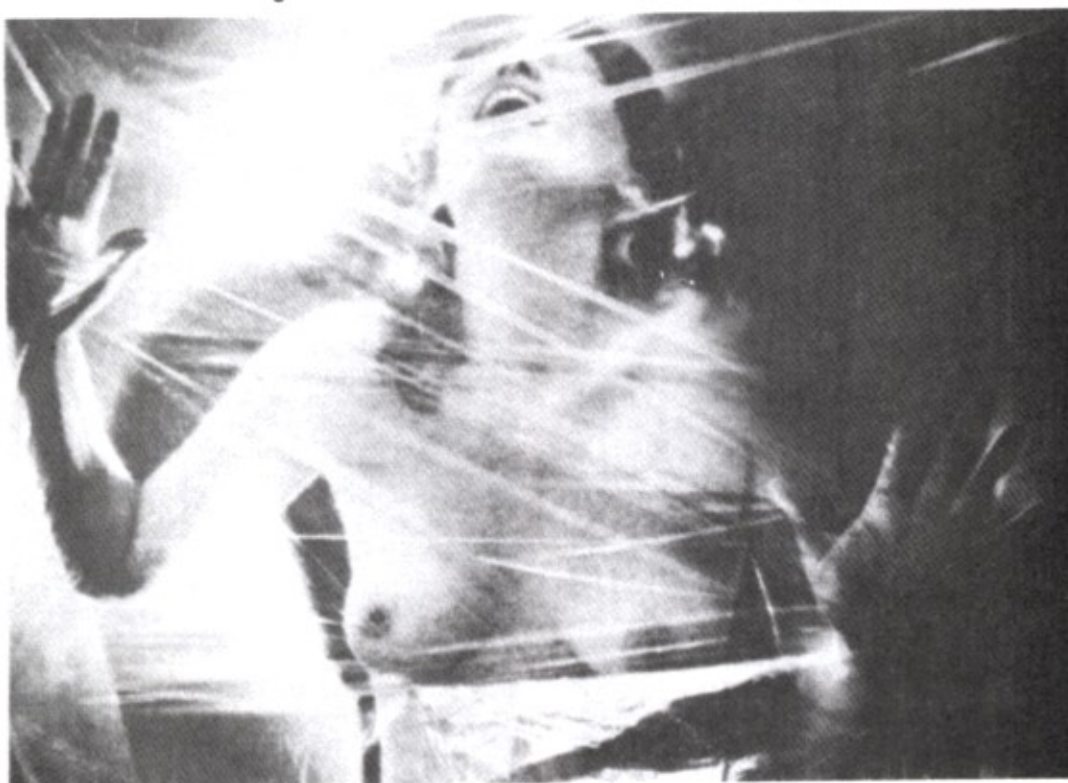
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TOWARDS A CANADIAN (INTER)NATIONAL CINEMA

(part 2: Loyalties and Life Classes)

by Robin Wood

In view of the editorial I co-authored with Richard Lippe in *CineAction!* 13/14 (to which Janine Marchessault takes such exception), it may seem perverse of me to choose now to discuss two films . . . which few have heard of, fewer have seen, and most have little chance of seeing. I must therefore begin by attempting some redefinition of my position. Both *Loyalties* and *Life Classes* could, and should, have reached a far wider audience than they did on their release, and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that they may still do so; both played commercially (however briefly); *Loyalties* has been shown on commercial TV, and *Life Classes* on pay-TV, in Canada, and there is absolutely no *intrinsic* reason why they should not be taken up for distribution and broadcast in other countries; both are now available on video cassette in Canada and both are generally accessible narrative films. It is possible to envisage a cultural evolution in which *Loyalties*, at least, would become a *popular* film, and in which *Life Classes* would achieve long runs in 'specialist' theatres. This is simply not true of the work of (for example) Snow, Wieland, Elder, Brakhage . . . Whatever value their films possess (I do not pretend to be in a position to offer an enlightened

judgment) resides in their opposition to the norms of a mainstream cinema without which they would have no function. Personally, I would not wish to live in a culture whose dominant cinema was represented by *Reason Over Passion*; the public that flocked to such a film for pleasure would have to be not only totally transformed but totally dehumanized, in any sense in which the word 'human' has meaning for me.

The two films also help me to define more precisely my attitude to Canadian culture, internationalism, and the cinema. Both are 'Canadian' in more than the means of production: both make detailed, extensive and expressive use of Canadian environments and their cultural specificity, and they are the richer for that. (This is especially true of *Life Classes* where one senses throughout the filmmaker's intimacy and inwardness with the environments he is describing). Yet the thematic concerns that motive, animate and structure both films know no national boundaries. In essentials, their narratives could be transplanted to other cultures without loss to their overall significance: the English family of *Loyalties* who move to Lac LaBiche, Alberta, could be a Boston family moving to a small town in Arizona; the Mary Cameron of *Life Classes* who moves from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, could be a Scottish woman who moves from the Highlands to Edinburgh (she

would not even have to undergo a change of name). What would be lost (and the loss would be substantial) would be precisely the filmmakers' intimacy with the environment: the quality of the films would certainly be affected. There would be some point in saying that *Life Classes*, at least, is a great film because it is Canadian, so long as one adds that it is a great film because it also totally transcends any question of national culture and national identity. Let me — in order to lay to rest for the remainder of this article this exasperating and sterile chimera of a 'Canadian national identity' — go further: neither of the films, as far as I can see, shows the slightest interest in it, seeing clearly that it (a) doesn't exist and (b) can't be produced to order. Their view of Canadian culture is uncompromisingly bleak, and if both end on a note of tentative optimism this has nothing to do with national identity and everything to do with the emergence of a female strength and autonomy: it is women's identity that is in question. The only culture that is viewed positively is seen as irreparably destroyed: the two films contain (surely coincidentally, as no direct connection appears to exist between them) exactly parallel scenes in which a woman from an ethnic minority (native in *Loyalties*, immigrant in *Life Classes*) laments the destruction of her community by the encroachment of white capitalist civilization.

Both *Loyalties* and *Life Classes* are centred on the evolution of a woman's consciousness and her movement towards liberation. Both have admirable titles, rich in connotations in relation to their respective films (though neither, unfortunately, is very 'box-office'; perhaps they should have been called, respectively, *Psycho Rapist* and *Take Off Your Clothes*). Lily Sutton/Susan Wooldridge must pass from a 'loyalty' that is a matter of convention to a 'loyalty' built upon passionate and personal moral conviction; the 'life classes' in which Mary Cameron/Jacinta Cormier is educated are far more than just the art classes in which she poses as a model (we might say that each sequence in the film constitutes a 'life class,' both for the character and the audience). I shall begin by trying to define certain major differences between them (differences of stance and address rather than of theme) before examining each in detail.

I have already suggested that the potential audiences for the films (though there would be substantial overlap) would be somewhat different. *Loyalties* should pose no problems (other than those arising from ideological bias) for audiences who brought to it expectations derived from their experience of Hollywood movies and in particular the women's melodrama, the genre to which it essentially belongs. It conforms to all the principles of classical narrative — the Barthesian interweaving chains of actions and enigmas, very densely worked, the development of conflicts and their resolution, with an end that very precisely answers the beginning, elaborately developed patterns of symmetry, contrast and parallelism — and it adopts unquestionably the dominant modes of shooting and editing, showing not the slightest ambition in the direction of formal innovation. It could, I suppose, be a TV movie, if TV movies were ever this good. *Life Classes* would require more adjustment. Its self-reflexive credits sequences (opening and closing) apart, it also remains strictly within the bounds of classical narrative, but its pace is very leisurely, its cause-and-effect linear progress much less obvious (much less signalled) than we expect, its conflicts (though always realized dramatically) more inward, its 'conceptual underpinnings' much less immediately accessible. We can have no doubt as to what *Loyalties* is about, it is all 'up front,' while *Life Classes* retains, below a certain level, an aura of mystery, its semantic/symbolic structure more com-

plex and resonant, less thoroughly subordinated to the narrative. I don't want to suggest that *Loyalties* can be reduced to a 'message' movie, but one might sum up the basic differences between the two films as that between statement and exploration: *Loyalties* gives the impression of knowing precisely what it wants to say, and it says it with great strength and clarity; *Life Classes* is at once more complex and more tentative, as if feeling its way among wider and more abstract issues that traditional realist narrative, with its constant personalizing tendency, cannot easily encompass. It follows logically that McGillivray's film, while it never moves outside the bounds of accepted shooting/editing conventions, repeatedly pushes at those bounds, evolving an idiosyncratic system within them in which long takes and 360 degree tracking have more important roles.

The films confront us, then, with two distinct models of authorship and authorial personality. If great art is both personal and impersonal (personal in its conviction, impersonal in its successful subjugation of the merely personal), then we may say that the impersonality of *Loyalties* is the more secure, that of *Life Classes* the more impressive, because so much more difficult of attainment. Anne Wheeler addresses us through long-established and highly developed narrative and cinematic conventions, in a language that is not her own but which she firmly and confidently appropriates. In *Life Classes* I seem to hear William McGillivray speaking to me, and I am impressed that, unlike so many 'personal' filmmakers who step somewhat outside the dominant norms, he wishes to talk to me about things other than himself. *Loyalties* seems to me a great film but (as is the case with so many classical Hollywood movies) its greatness may be attributable less to an individual author than to a confluence of factors: director (certainly — there can be no doubt of Wheeler's mastery of her medium nor of her grasp of her subject), script (by Sharon Riis, though Wheeler is credited as collaborating on the story development), actors, inherited conventions. I would feel greater confidence in asserting that *Life Classes* is the work of a great artist (which, contrariwise, is by no means to denigrate the contributions of McGillivray's collaborators).

Note: As I want both to encourage readers to go out of their way to see these two films and to press for their wider distribution or TV exposure, I shall not offer formal plot synopses, which too easily become substitutes for the actual experience of viewing. I shall, however, whenever necessary describe the action in sufficient detail to make what I am saying about them comprehensible, hopefully without spoiling the (always legitimate) pleasure of following the unfolding of a narrative.

Loyalties

Loyalties is centred on the developing relationship between two seemingly incompatible women, who win through to friendship and solidarity simply because they are women, their growing insights into their situations (their own and each other's) overcoming all the social barriers of class, race and upbringing. The women are characterized through a system of oppositions (starting from their names, 'Lily' and 'Rose'-anne) so complete as to appear on paper schematic, a danger avoided (a) because the acting is so detailed, the characterizations so intelligently complex, that one never sees them as mere examples in a thesis, (b) because each woman is presented independently, in the context of an intricately described personal situation involving male partners, children and mother, and (c) because the stages in the development of

the relationship are realized so convincingly (in retrospect) and so unobtrusively (we don't grasp quite where the film is heading until at least halfway through). For purposes of analysis, however, it is useful to strip away the film's living flesh of acting and *mise-en-scène* in order to expose the schematic skeleton (as it might have appeared on paper, during the elaboration of the scenario) — though I shall try to restore some of the flesh with my annotations.

1. *Race*. Lily is white ('very white — lilywhite,' as Roseanne caustically informs her mother in the early stage of the women's acquaintance): blonde, pale, slender, refined and fragile-looking. Roseanne is 'part Indian' ('Which part?', one of Lily's children wants to know; 'My left foot'), dark-skinned, dark-haired, physically robust.

2. *Class*. Lily is British upper-class, with 'pots of money,' and brings with her from England all her inherited class presumption. Roseanne is working class, with no capital to fall back on when she loses her job. As Lily takes her status for granted, the film's treatment of the class issue is articulated most explicitly through Roseanne's invariably shrewd comments. To her lover Eddy, in bed: 'I know one thing for sure — the only difference between her and me is money. But one hell of a difference.' Then, in their reconciliation in Roseanne's home after Lily dismisses her in a fit of rage/hysteria, in response to Lily's slightly gushing expression of pleasure: 'Going to make a speech about the happy poor next?'

3. *Mistress/servant*. Lily, trying to 'settle in' to an environment totally alien to her ('It's so forlorn') with the three youngest of her children, pleads repeatedly with her husband David to get help. Circumstances throw Roseanne in their path and (partly from his own devious and only half-conscious motives) he offers her the job. Lily's use of her class status ('Lily of the gilded upbringing,' as David refers to her later) as a means of insulation and self-protection is beautifully established in her insistence on the traditional, ritualistic, 'interview' ('Do you have references? . . . Have you done this kind of work before?'), the more inappropriate as we have already perceived Roseanne's strength and intelligence, know (as does Lily) that she is the mother of several children, and is aware of Lily's desperate need of assistance. Roseanne, on the other hand, while accepting the 'servant' role, maintains her dignity and self-respect by means of a consistently ironic stance that just keeps on the tactful side of insolence.

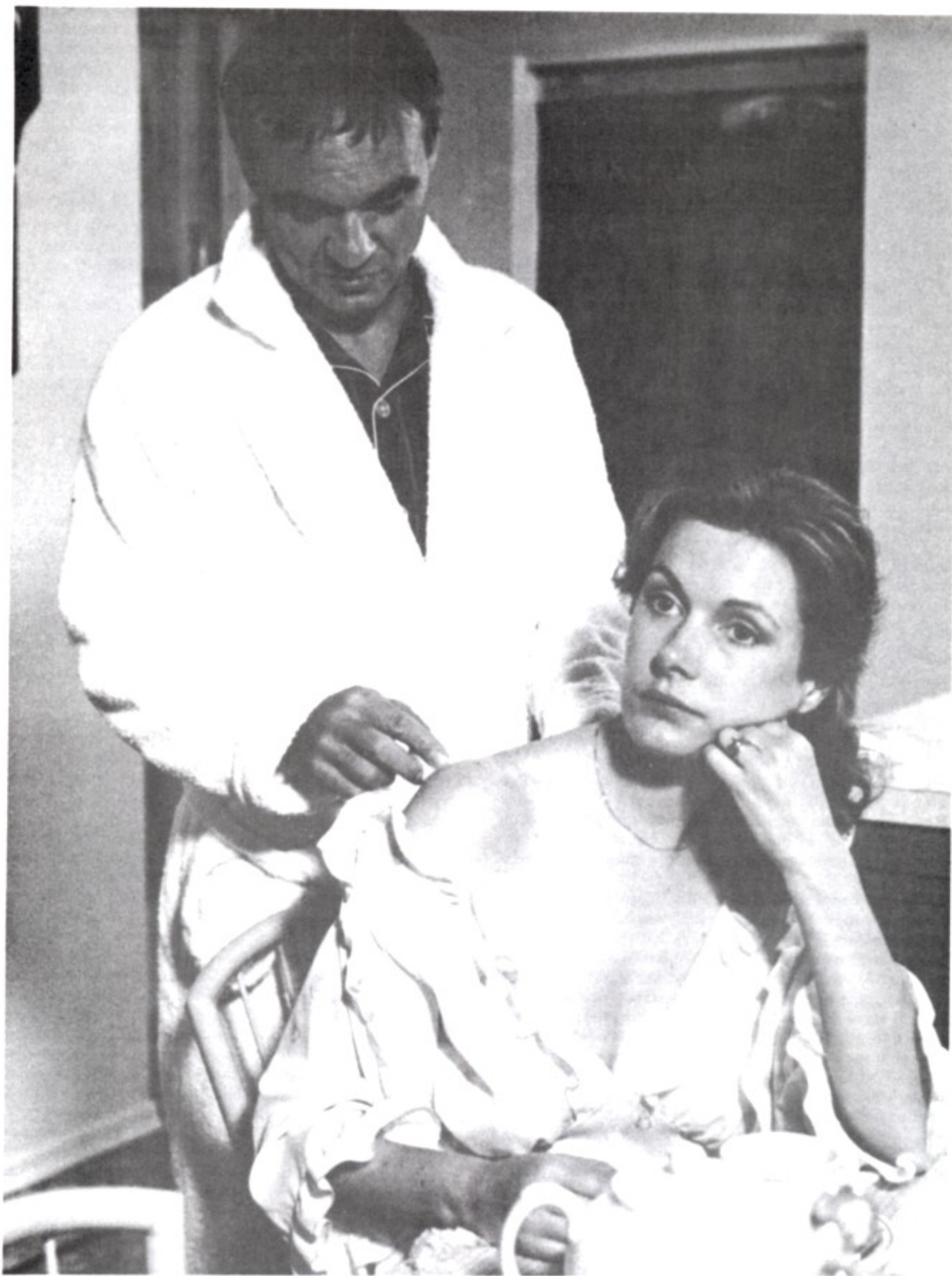
4. *Marriage/non-marriage*. Lily suggests to Roseanne (who, near the beginning of the film, was beaten up by Eddy in the restaurant where she works) that she see a marriage counsellor. Roseanne looks at her incredulously: 'We're not married!' — though previously Eddy, wanting to patch things up, has responded to Roseanne's succinct 'shit for brains' with 'Two of those kids are mine.' Later, as the two women garden together and Roseanne begins to test how far she can go, she turns it back on Lily with good-humoured irony (the ironic repetition of other people's phrases is a recurrent motif of her characterization): 'Ever thought of seeing a marriage counsellor? — You *are* married, aren't you?' — To which Lily, after a moment's hesitation between resentment and acceptance, capitulates with a wry smile: 'Oh yes, *very*.'

5. *Entrapment/autonomy*. The film makes it clear that Lily's sense of being 'very' married has little to do with love, nothing to do with sexual fulfillment, and everything to do with social convention: she is trapped not merely in a relationship but in the whole network of assumptions and expectations concerning conjugal and maternal dedication that validates it. Roseanne's rejection of marriage allows her a (relative) autonomy that includes, especially, the ability to

stand up to a man who abuses her, but also a freedom from fixed social roles, a freedom to make her own decisions. Lily, as upper-class wife and mother, has 'had' to come to Lac LaBiche, 'has' to be supportive of David, despite everything (I shall return to 'everything' later), 'has' to keep the family unit together: her husband (as patriarch and breadwinner — for all Lily's 'pots of money') decides not only where she shall live but what friends she shall have and how she will relate to them.

6. *Mothers*. Lily tells Roseanne that her mother (who is 'in' the film only by reference) was always distant, sent her away to school at the earliest opportunity, and (apart from leaving her 'pots of money') more or less broke off relations with her when she married David, regarding him as their social inferior (she couldn't accept a son-in-law whose father 'worked with his hands'). Set against this is the portrayal of Roseanne's Indian mother Beatrice, unobtrusive, critical, seldom speaking, but always 'there' to the point of being taken for granted. There is no question here of sentimentality or condescension: the film is never tempted to 'make a speech about the happy poor.' It is in fact quite clear that the mother's supportiveness is to some degree a consequence of her doubly oppressed condition (as woman, as Indian): she is a person who asks for nothing and expects nothing. Yet her emancipated, self-assertive and demanding daughter (who behaves in ways of which her mother would never have dreamed) has inherited the supportiveness and generosity: she is raising not only her own children but an unwanted child of her sister's as if *he* were her own as well. The film also credits the mother with — besides stoical resignation — intelligence, and suggests that Roseanne's habitual irony is another inherited trait. When Roseanne apologises to Lily for her remark about the 'happy poor,' the mother moves quietly across the room (in the background of the image) to the wall calendar. Asked what she is doing, she replies, good-humouredly, 'In thirty years I've never once heard you say you were sorry, so I'm marking that day.' The mother/daughter relationship throughout the film amounts to a marvelously convincing embodiment of human solidarity across a seemingly extreme generation gap, built upon mutual understanding, sympathy, acceptance and respect.

7. *Children*. Only one child (Lily's eldest, Robert) plays an independently significant role in the narrative (as at once witness and judge). Otherwise, what is most important is the two women's attitude to and treatment of their children. The contrast is established within minutes of Roseanne's beginning work as Lily's servant, in Lily's panic reaction when she finds Nicky (the second son) carving windows in a cardboard packing-box to make a house ('Didn't I tell you never to play with knives?'): the knife was given to him by Roseanne, as a matter of course, in the interests of creative play, the incident setting working-class tough-minded practicality against upper-class squeamish over-protectiveness. The protectiveness extends far beyond the fear of physical injury: no secrets are kept from Roseanne's children, while the Sutton family live under the cloud of the unspoken and the unspeakable, the principle extending (by tacit agreement) to the husband/wife relationship, wherein problems known to exist can never be discussed. Robert becomes the crux of the opposition, the cause both of the breach between the two women and its resolution. The film's presentation of Robert is one of its many triumphs (one admires throughout the respect with which Wheeler treats children, without the least trace of 'cuteness,' condescension or sentimentality, but with consistently sensitive insight into their position *as* children). Roseanne's unsolicited advice to Lily to 'leave him alone' (at



Loyalties: a marriage characterized by frustration and discontent.

breakfast, the morning after his arrival from England, when Lily is telling him 'how much he'll like it here' and trying to bribe him into acquiescence with promises of jeans and cowboy suits) — the advice that precipitates her dismissal — has resonances far beyond the immediate situation. Robert (as first-born, burdened from birth with the mantle of patriarchal tradition) has clearly never been 'left alone,' the impositions upon him including the agony of life in a British boys' public school where 'everybody knows' of his father's disgrace. Sullen and withdrawn, he strikes us when we first meet him as irreparably harmed. It is Lily's own sensitivity to her son's needs (a sensitivity partially compromised by her 'loyalty' to those class and gender assumptions that dictate how a male child should be raised and what he should be, a sensitivity emphatically not shared by his father) that forces her to recognize that Roseanne's characteristically terse and tactless comment is absolutely on the mark and leads to her decisions (a) to keep Robert at Lac LaBiche and (b) visit Roseanne to apologize and reconcile: crucial stages in her evolution.

8. *Men*. The film's presentation of Eddy and David is built upon a basic opposition that can seem, again, on paper, simplistic and potentially sentimental: part-Indian/working-class/sexually healthy/redeemable vs. white/'professional' class/sexually perverted/unredeemable. Again, it seems to me that the treatment of character and social context is so convincingly thought and felt that any such reductionism is transcended. Eddy's 'healthy sexuality' is associated with a brutish 'masculinity' that has to be rectified before a satisfactory relationship with Roseanne becomes feasible. The 'masculinity,' indeed, is associated not only with violence but with possessiveness, fear of women's autonomy, the desire to define the woman solely as wife/mother. In the first scene in which he and Roseanne appear, we are not allowed to know of their relationship: she is a waitress in the bar area of the hotel in which Lily spends her first evening, he (a) attempts to 'feel her up' and (b) assaults her when she indignantly resists, striking her across the mouth and inflicting the injury that will require stitches and leave her with a slight permanent scar. The incident is rich in those complex relevances (theorized by Barthes as the 'five codes' of *S/Z*) upon and through which classical narrative is structured: i. Although Lily does not personally witness it (she is in the somewhat more formal and genteel restaurant area), it stands in for the crudity and vulgarity of Lac LaBiche culture against which her upper-class English refinement initially revolts but which the film reveals as having compensatory positive characteristics (energy, camaraderie, a sense of community, however debased its values) from which she is (again initially) excluded. ii. It brings together Roseanne and David (who, as a doctor, volunteers to accompany her to the hospital to treat her wound). iii. It develops doubts already implanted about the nature of the Sutton marriage, David's readiness to leap to his professional duty appearing simultaneously as an eagerness to get away from his wife (during her first evening in her new environment, weary with travel fatigue and burdened with three young children). iv. In retrospect (when we learn that Eddy and Roseanne have been lovers for some years and that he is the father of two of her children), it establishes the macho/patriarchal basis of their (initial) relationship: his assumption of proprietorship, his resentment of the fact that she has her own workplace independent of him, his sexual possessiveness (his 'advances' are those of any drunken customer getting 'fresh,' hence an expression of his awareness that this is the kind of thing she encounters — and perhaps responds to — every night).

The incident is answered by the bedroom scene much later

in the film, where Eddy and Roseanne (whose mother, with her habitual sympathetic diplomacy, has taken the kids to the movies for the evening), in bed discuss their possible future and the conditions that would enable it. In the interim, the process whereby Roseanne reaches her decision to accept Eddy back is beautifully charted. Eddy's revelation that he gave up drinking the day after he beat her up; his attempts at propitiation by loaning her his truck; Lily's (somewhat condescending) approval of him when he desposits the truck at the house ('... rather charming in his own way'); the boy Jesse's confused allegiances and needs ('You still look beat up ... He said he was sorry'); Beatrice's characteristically tacit but tacitly potent influence: we register all of these less as determining pressures than as contributing factors, the decision being very much Roseanne's own. The renegotiation of the relationship, as the couple lie in bed, is extremely tentative, with no guarantees. At dinner, Eddy has talked of his acceptance in a heavy-equipment operator's course that provides family housing, adding hopefully 'All you have to do is have a family' (the moment when Beatrice decides to take the kids to the movies!). Roseanne now opens with the suggestion that she might want to go back to school, too (with Eddy wondering what for), and goes on to assert her intention of trying to get her waitress job back. When Eddy tells her he'll be making enough money, she tells him it's because she *wants* to. He accepts, with obvious reluctance ('I'll give it a try, Rose'), and offers his own counter-condition: 'But you've got to stop telling me and everybody what an asshole I am!' To which she, replies, pointedly, 'I'll give it a try, Edward.'

Similarly, the presentation of David Sutton is less simple than the white/professional/perverted formula suggests. For a start, he is of working-class background and, although he has cultivated an impeccable 'British' accent, can still resume his (presumably) native Yorkshire dialect when it suits him (it suits him, significantly, on occasions when he refers ironically to his wife's class status — the 'famous upper-crust resilience' with which he encourages her to adapt to the 'forlorn' environment of Lac LaBiche). He has not (as Roseanne assumes) married Lily for her 'pots of money': they live on his income, not her capital, and she even has to appeal to him on the issue of employing a servant. Nor — if one ponders the relationship retrospectively — has he married her solely because of her social status: he is clearly considerably older than she is, and they have been married at least 12 years (Robert is 'nearly 12'), and we must assume that Lily was very young at the time of the wedding, young enough to appear an attractive wife for a compulsive molester of teenage girls anxious for respectability and upward mobility. Though it seems at times tempted to do so (our response to Roseanne's 'I wouldn't touch that creep with a crowbar,' when she thinks Lily suspects her of having designs on her husband, is clearly not unsympathetic), the film never produces David as a monster: it is too aware of the pressures of class and gender expectations on the individual. David's inability to function sexually with adult women is clearly exacerbated by his constant sense of Lily's class superiority — her status, her wealth, her education, her classical music, her proficiency at the piano, her refined 'lilywhite' beauty. If the film certainly does not ask us to excuse his erotic obsession with the adolescent daughter of a working-class part-Indian woman (particularly as he allows himself to succumb to it with so little struggle), it at least permits us to understand its sources. (Obviously, one of the film's greatest strengths is its refusal to present its tensions and conflicts in *simply* individual terms: we are consistently referred to social structures and social

conventions). The use of the Browning/Lugosi *Dracula* (which Leona, babysitting for Lily while she and Roseanne go out for the evening, is watching on television when David arrives home unexpectedly from his fishing trip) is a marvelous use of ironic contrast. The clip shows Dracula controlling a woman by a mere gesture of his hands: the patriarchal myth of irresistible male potency is immediately juxtaposed with the desperate, messy rape in the mud of a struggling adolescent. (All this said, it can still be argued that it is a pity that David's form of sexual deviancy is one unacceptable by *any* moral standards — the issues would have been somewhat more complex had he been presented as gay, for example, and attracted to adult males. But perhaps I am falling into the common trap of rewriting movies to make them conform to one's own life.)

The question of identification — always a crucial issue in one's experience of a classical narrative film, and susceptible of infinite inflections and variations — becomes especially interesting in *Loyalties*, given that the potential primary audience for the film was presumably envisaged as (a) North American, (b) middle-class, (c) urban, and (d) white: there isn't a single figure in the film who offers such an audience the possibility of a straightforward, uncomplicated identification. At the outset, the obvious primary identification figure is Lily: not only is she the first major character to be introduced (though it is interesting that the first point of view, in the deliberately somewhat obscure pre-credit sequence that forms the basis of the film's chain of hermeneutics, is Robert's, at this stage unidentified) — she represents our access to an 'alien' culture, like, for example, Eva Marie Saint in *Exodus* or Jean Arthur in *Only Angels*

Have Wings, the medium through whom we explore and become acclimatized to the culture's values. This identification, though both functional and important in guiding our initial reading of the action, is qualified from the outset by two factors: Lily's upper-class British persona (as alien to the presumed audiences as the society of Lac LaBiche), and the early introduction of sequences centred on Roseanne, from which Lily is absent. It also has to survive Roseanne's description of her (which we register as not entirely unjustified) as 'a real airhead.' The film's structuring strategy is progressively to transfer this *primary* identification from Lily to Roseanne, a figure multiply alien as non-white, non-urban, and non-middle-class. It would be unfair to say, in a film in which the acting — from lead roles to the most subordinate 'support' — is uniformly magnificent, that Tantoo Cardinal 'steals' the picture; yet her remarkable presence certainly gives substance to — 'realizes' — the transference implicit in the movement of the scenario.

It is in relation to Lily, nonetheless, that the film's attitude to the culture of Lac LaBiche is defined. The note is struck at the beginning, with Audrey's well-meaning, good-natured crassness ('I just *love* the way you people talk') and Lily's glance of gratitude at David when Audrey can't understand why he has booked his wife and children into a hotel for the few days before their new house is ready, when they could have stayed with *her*. The film is far from endorsing Lily's well-bred superiority, but its grasp of the barrenness of a society without roots and without the sense of tradition, its inhabitants an easy prey to the values and indulgences of consumer-capitalism, is absolutely sure. Audrey's garden party, with its Quiche Lorraine, the strawberry daiquiris



A mother's vengeance: Tantoo Cardinal in *Loyalties*.

which she discovered in Hawaii and which Lily describes as 'rather like pudding,' and the steady escalation into general drunkenness, is a marvellous example of the film's control of tone and attitude. The attitude is never derisive or unkind — quite the contrary. The concern is with cultural deprivation (Audrey, as suburban housewife, apparently spends most of her afternoons drinking herself to sleep), and the quiche and the daiquiris come across, not as instances of bourgeois pretentiousness, but as misguided attempts to fill an absence. It is the inherent goodwill that gets the emphasis. By the end of the evening Lily (who initially wished to be taken home) is ready to admit that she rather enjoyed herself (indeed, at the moment when David removes her, she is on the point of accepting some 'really good dope').

However, the level of Lac LaBiche culture into which Lily becomes (through Roseanne) most nearly integrated is not the bourgeois-professional but the proletarian: the garden party is balanced by the sequence in which Roseanne takes her out to celebrate her birthday (the birthday that David has forgotten in favour of a fishing trip), and Lily 'lets her hair down' both literally and metaphorically. Perhaps the moment that most decisively marks her liberation from her inherited value-system is her delighted reaction when Roseanne, invited to perform, publicly dedicates her first song to 'that classy broad over there.' The working-class culture is certainly not idealized (it is again characterized predominantly by heavy drinking, and it is a world in which women are 'broads,' classy or otherwise, and get slapped around by their husbands), but it is presented in terms of warmth, generosity and a strong sense of community (even the entertainment is communal, Roseanne's rendering of 'Happy Birthday to You' being greeted by a spontaneous display of lighter flames held up around Lily).

The (partial, qualified) identification with Lily is never entirely lost: partly sharing, partly critical of, her attitudes, we learn with her throughout the film. But as the narrative progresses, Roseanne becomes progressively its dominant presence, its moral centre, the source of strength (it is important that she too is never for a moment idealized: the positive human qualities she embodies are always convincingly *real*). Although we learn with Lily, it is also important that we are never entirely certain how much *she* has learnt — or, more precisely, how completely she has mastered and internalized her lessons. The effectiveness of the final scene depends upon this uncertainty, and its suspense is not achieved by withholding information so much as by the maintenance of doubt as to whether Lily will still permit herself and her actions to be determined by her social conditioning. That we register the ending as the 'right' one has less to do with a sense of inevitability (it has been convincingly enough prepared, but so has its opposite, the 'pessimistic' ending that Roseanne herself actually anticipates) than with our sense that, given a reasonable choice, it is always better to opt for generosity towards one's characters.

At the film's conclusion a new identification figure begins to emerge: Robert: giving retrospective point to the fact that his was the first POV we were invited to share. We register an important difference, I think, between Roseanne's hysterical denunciation of Lily ('Call yourself a woman? Bitch!') and Robert's denunciation of his father ('Bastard! Bastard! You did it again!'). Both comments are (given the circumstances) fully understandable, and both are in a sense just. But the justice of Roseanne's is too absolute: we want to temper it with mercy, and of course she implicitly withdraws it in the final moments. Robert's judgement, on the other hand, is

definitive: if David is in many ways pathetic and a victim (of gender and class pressures and conditioning), this does not absolve him from personal responsibility for his actions. Throughout, Robert has shown marked 'feminine' characteristics (in terms of our culture's division of gender), such as sensitivity and delicacy. We understand, from his clearly irreversible rejection of his father, that he will grow up woman-identified, and this is touchingly confirmed by his immediate request to see Leona when Lily brings him to Roseanne's house.

A friend raised the objection that the film never really confronts the abysmal treatment of the native population in white Canadian culture or adequately expresses the anger that Indians feel: no Indian woman, he said, would ever make friends with an Englishwoman, whom she could regard only as an oppressor. I think, put like that, this is asking the film to take on issues it never in fact proposes: it would have to start from an entirely different premise. Roseanne is, after all, only *part*-Indian, and she has become largely (if uneasily) integrated into white culture. The objection is, however, worth reformulating more generally, in relation to the film's overall stance: is it ultimately contained within a modified liberalism that can accommodate its class/gender/race insights? 'Liberalism' and 'radicalism' can never be entirely discrete conceptually: there will always be areas of overlap, and those areas will always be uneasy, ambiguous, without the satisfying clearcutness that can make our lives and beliefs so simple (at great cost, I think). To put it another way: one can never successfully equate radicalism with a 'return to zero.' One could certainly describe the film's re-institution of a modified concept of marriage and family (through Eddy and Roseanne, with the failure of the Sutton marriage attributed to one man's abnormality rather than to the institution) as a 'liberal' project. At the same time, one must insist that the implications it generates push the 'liberal' boundaries pretty near bursting-point, and that it is difficult to conceive of ways of human relating that would totally exclude *all* possible concepts of 'marriage' (not necessarily permanent, heterosexual or monogamous) and 'family' (not necessarily biological or indissoluble). A 'liberal' movie that pushes the boundaries this far lends itself very readily to 'radical' appropriation.

Life Classes

The phrase 'conceptual underpinnings' occurs in *Life Classes* twice. The first time it is used by the pretentious woman who interviews Mary Cameron for employment, to express her superiority to someone who enjoys 'painting by numbers.' The second time it is used by the art historian whose lecture Mary attends, with reference to De Kooning, Kandinsky, etc., to describe the concerns of various modern artists: not the outward appearance but the inner energies and tensions that structure it. The theme, if not the phrase, is further developed in the instructions of the teacher of life classes for which Mary becomes a model, a woman presented as intelligent and sympathetic, and who influences Mary's development. I deduce from this (a) that McGillivray would like to direct our attention to the 'conceptual underpinnings' of his film, beyond the 'realist' level of character, action and behaviour, but (b) that he has a dread of appearing pretentious. Diffidence seems to me an important component of the authorial personality *Life Classes* embodies (it is the least arrogant of films); intelligence is another. Taking the hint, I shall concentrate on the film's thematic level,



Life Classes: Jacinta Cormier as Mary Cameron.

examining five concerns which continuously interpenetrate: feminism; the relation of present and future to the past; the country vs. city opposition; the different artistic modes available in contemporary culture; attitudes to the media and technology.

Mary never becomes aware that she is part of an international political movement (though her friend and work-mate Gloria is, asking at a seminar about 'the politics of being a woman artist in Germany today'), and the word 'feminist' does not occur in the film. Yet the most obvious level of its discourse — that of the 'evolution of a woman's consciousness' — is unmistakably feminist, every lesson that Mary learns being at once personal and more-than-personal: I might justly have described the film's concern as being with the evolution of a *feminist* consciousness. It is (for better or for worse — I don't mean this as a value-judgment) more explicit about this than the film with which it most invites comparison, Tavernier's *Une Semaine de Vacances*. It is a comparison to which *Life Classes* seems to me to stand up remarkably well (no small tribute, as I still consider *Une Semaine* as the finest work to date of one of the contemporary cinema's major artists) considering Tavernier's enormous advantages: long experience of feature filmmaking, working within a long-established and still vital artistic (and critical) tradition, with incomparably superior financial resources and technical facilities. In fact, I am never aware in watching *Life Classes* of technical shortcomings: McGillivray has the true artist's ability to find the means fully to realize his concerns within the available resources, and there is never any sense of a discrepancy between ambition and technique. I have heard the term 'minimalist' applied to the film. Peter Harcourt's article on McGillivray's earlier works in *CineAction* 5 suggests that, carefully qualified, it might be applicable to *them*; but, insofar as it evokes the inane doodlings of a Philip Glass or the non-committal shrug-of-the-shoulders of a Jim Jarmusch, it is extremely misleading applied to a profoundly committed film like *Life Classes*. Presumably, it is a means of pointing to the strict economy of McGillivray's style: it is a film entirely devoid of frills and flourishes, there is no attempt to woo the audience with a seductive charm (which is one of the things that makes it so captivating), and, (aside from the use of slow motion in the credit sequences) there is a total rejection of cinematic rhetoric (the 360 degree tracking-shots, which I shall discuss later, are strictly functional, not decorative). Against the complete confidence and mastery of the Tavernier film, one must acknowledge a certain hesitancy and reticence, the 'diffidence' I spoke of earlier. These are qualities that have been mythologized as peculiarly Canadian, yet I want to resist any inclination to incorporate *Life Classes* into a 'national Canadian cinema,' as if that accounted for it: it is much too good for such a fate. (*Une Semaine de Vacances* is just as 'French' as *Life Classes* is 'Canadian,' but no one as far as I know has used that descriptive label to pigeonhole it and circumscribe its significance). The hesitancy and reticence can be equally attributed to the supposition that McGillivray is a profoundly honest person tackling issues of immense international cultural significance gently and unpretentiously.

If I had been shown *Loyalties* and *Life Classes* unprepared, and asked to guess which was made by a woman, I think I would have chosen *Life Classes*. This is partly because *Loyalties* adopts unquestioningly the mode and norms of the dominant (hence patriarchal) tradition — in my opinion a perfectly defensible strategy, but one to which many feminist writers on film have expressed strenuous opposition. The style and enunciation of *Life Classes*, on the other hand,

consistently suggest a search for an alternative mode of expression subtly deviating from the norms (by a process of selection and emphasis — we are not talking about *Riddles of the Sphinx* here). Further, the enunciation is characterized by qualities our culture tends to regard as feminine (sensitive and reticent, as against the direct and forceful 'masculine' address of *Loyalties*). Even the treatment of David Sutton might be seen as a not uncommon form of male masochism, as against the feminist firmness with which Earl/Leon Dubinsky is treated in *Life Classes*. More important, however, is the extraordinary intimacy and inwardness of McGillivray's relationship to his central figure, both actress and character — a feature that again evokes comparison with *Une Semaine de Vacances*. This impression is by no means contradicted — rather the contrary — by the fact that we feel we 'know' Mary Cameron rather less completely than we 'know' the women of *Loyalties*. The latter have the life of fully realized fictional characters: they are fully known by their authors (who after all created them). The 'life' of Mary Cameron is something more than that: she is allowed to retain something of her mystery, the not-quite-knowability of a 'real' human being. In other words, the relationship of filmmaker/actress/character is rather more complex here than in *Loyalties*. Though I shall postpone discussion of the opening and ending credit sequences — the framing prologue and epilogue — until later, one aspect is relevant here. In the shopping mall we are led in to watch a television interview with Jacinta Cormier, attending the premiere of *Life Classes* in Halifax, questioned about the character she plays. Her response expresses a complex combination of empathy and uncertainty, with 'I guess' a key phrase: 'She's a product of the culture . . . and a victim, I guess . . . and the changes that it's going through.' She is both like and unlike Mary: 'I grew up in a small town too, and like her . . . I was (pause) forced (sounds uncertain of the word's appropriateness), I guess to leave home . . . Mary eventually becomes more . . . (sentence left incomplete). Was the role difficult for her? 'Yes . . . No, not really. I came to know her. Not that it was easy. She's a very complex character. I'm still not sure I fully understand her or her motives.' — Mary Cameron is, of course, a fictional character who does not exist outside the film. But Jacinta Cormier does, and she both is and is not Mary Cameron. There is then the relationship of McGillivray to Cameron/Cormier, which seems at once symbiotic and distanced, and which determines the viewer's relationship: we both identify with Cameron/Cormier and study her.

Mary's development, while in some ways dependent upon her family and environmental background, is accelerated — in its essentials, even made possible — by the move from Cape Breton to Halifax. The small town/country community is never sentimentalized, either past or present. The film's view is that, if there was once a form of 'organic culture' there of any character or distinction, it is now irretrievably gone, and nostalgic laments for its passing would be a waste of time: if it was ever there its traces have been thoroughly obliterated by the irresistible flood of consumer capitalism, technology and the media. The predicament of Mary's grandmother, drifting isolated into senility ('No one has any time for old ladies') eloquently sums up the sense of cultural deprivation which the film shares with *Loyalties*: on the one hand she clings on to otherwise long-abandoned straws from the past (memories, snatches of Gaelic), on the other her days are passed propped in front of a TV screen watching the 'stories' (as she calls whatever drifts before her consciousness, soaps, sitcoms, newsreels . . .). Neither is the city in any way glamourised; but it is presented as offering Mary

opportunities for self-realization, for reaching an awareness (of herself, her potential, her social position) that she could never have reached in the country.

Central to this process of self-realization is Mary's discovery of herself as an artist, the various stages of which correspond to McGillivray's inquiry into the modes of contemporary art and his defence of a qualified representationalism, leading to an implied affinity between Mary's paintings and his film (hence again confirming his identification with his leading character). Before I examine those stages (which are essential to the film's structure, both narrative and conceptual), I must confront one possible objection, the question of plausibility. Mary's somewhat abrupt discovery of authentic creative gifts (it is not clear to me exactly how much time passed between her first attempts at 'personal' expression and her solo art exhibition, but it appears to be a matter of months rather than years) imposes some strain on the credibility. The point I want to make is that, while arguably *improbably*, it is not *impossible*. Many of the attacks on Realism have centred on the assumption that it can only endlessly reproduce what is already *there* (external appearances, social structures) and is powerless to change it. But why should Realism be tied to probability? Why not a Realism of the *possible*, allowing for greater freedom, the potential for leaps of the imagination (both the filmmaker's and the characters')? Mary's progress is validated by the spirit and progress of the film itself, its commitment to change, increased awareness, experimentation, audacity. The stages of Mary's self-discovery are sufficiently complex and suggestive to provide a basis for this leap into the possible:

1. *Painting by numbers*. It is greatly to McGillivray's credit that he never invites the viewer to feel superior to, or find ridiculous, Mary's painting-by-numbers. Within the context of an impoverished rural culture — the obliteration of its past compensated for by nothing more fulfilling than supermarkets and television — Mary's loving care is felt as bringing a certain creativity to an intrinsically non-creative form, and is respected as such. We are already aware, in fact, of a creative impulse that, lacking any valid tradition, has not as yet found an outlet, a mode of expression; just as, from the outset, we are made aware of Mary's native intelligence, her capacity for reflection, criticism, discrimination, autonomous judgment.

2. *The Interview*. At the employment agency in Halifax Mary's attention is drawn to an abstract, minimalist painting on the wall. The woman interviewing her asks her what she thinks of it, referring pretentiously to her own interest in 'conceptual underpinnings.' We register Mary's response ('Mine are better') as funny, certainly, but not stupid: its naiveté is set against the other woman's condescension and assumption of superiority, and Mary's confidence in the value of her own work — a confidence that does not strike us as arrogant — is an important pointer to the speed with which she develops her talent.

3. *The Lecture on Modernism*. Mary accompanies her friend Gloria (her fellow-assistant in the department store where she gets a job, and part-time art student) to an Art History lecture on modern painting (the scene where the phrase 'conceptual underpinnings' recurs). Back in Gloria's room, she expresses bafflement and hostility ('... pictures you can't even make sense of'). We need not of course take this as McGillivray's attitude to all abstract art (to identify with someone does not involve sharing all her/his opinions, and the film in no way satirizes the lecture); both Mary's exposure to modern art and her (initial) rejection of it mark an important stage in her critical evolution — her artist's sense of what

interests her. It is at the end of this scene that Gloria suggests that Mary supplement her income by 'sitting' for \$12.00 an hour.

4. *The Life Classes*. Mary's exposure of herself as nude model (itself an important step in her evolution as a person) is accompanied by her exposure to certain concepts of figure-drawing that are crucial to her artistic development. The teacher (a woman this time) instructs the students to make quick sketches ('gesture drawings') catching the body's action as Mary adopts different poses. The sketches are 'not supposed to look like anything,' the positive response to Mary's negative 'pictures you can't even make sense of': the aim is to capture the 'inner core,' not to produce outlines. At home afterwards with her child Marie, Mary attempts her first autonomous sketches, trying to capture the 'inner core' of the little girl's body. (At this point I want to digress in order to discuss the film's treatment of nudity).

If I remember correctly, Julia Lesage once remarked at a conference that men should be banned from photographing women for at least ten years. I hope she would allow an exception in the case of McGillivray. The way in which Jacinta Cormier is shot in the nude scenes implies a distinction between two terms that are frequently confused: being looked at and being objectified. We are invited to *look at* Mary, as at once a beautiful woman and a person, the two being inseparable (she is never treated as just *physically* beautiful). At no point is she objectified: we are always in intimate contact with her feelings, she is consistently a person rather than a body. The first scene in which she appears nude is particularly eloquent on this point: we share her embarrassment and intense unease as she poses within a circle of students for the first time, even as the camera compels us to watch her, as if our presence were adding to her discomfiture. This is the least pornographic of films: the human body is progressively demystified, its anatomy no longer a dirty secret, source of sniggers and titillation, but mature, matter-of-fact reality. Hence nudity in the film, instead of being an act of oppression, becomes a liberating experience both for Mary and the movie audience. It is important that Mary's nudity is balanced later by full-frontal male nudity: the young men participating in the avant-garde television 'happening,' and more especially Earl, the scene in which Mary persuades him to pose naked for her answering the three 'life classes' sequences, the demystification of the body capped by the demystification of the phallus.

Crucial to the treatment of nudity and the non-objectifying look at the female body is the set of three life-classes sequences, which form a progression in which similarity and difference are marked by the *mise-en-scène*. Each consists mainly (though not exclusively) of a 360-degree tracking-shot around the studio, as Mary poses naked for the students, yet each offers a different perspective, the three taken together adding up to a three-dimensional description of the experience of the life class. In the first, Mary is the centre of attention and empathy (shrinking, embarrassed, wondering if she should feel humiliated), the students kept in the background, anonymous and undifferentiated. The second focuses on the students, absorbed in the work, the teacher moving around to inspect their efforts, Mary entering the frame only later in the shot, the camera stopping when she is central to the image. The third shot concentrates on the students' drawings, the various (and markedly diverse) views of Mary's body (or its 'inner core'): while Mary is kept frame centre throughout, her body is repeatedly concealed by the sketches as the camera circles.

5. *The German Artist*. Gloria takes Mary to a special



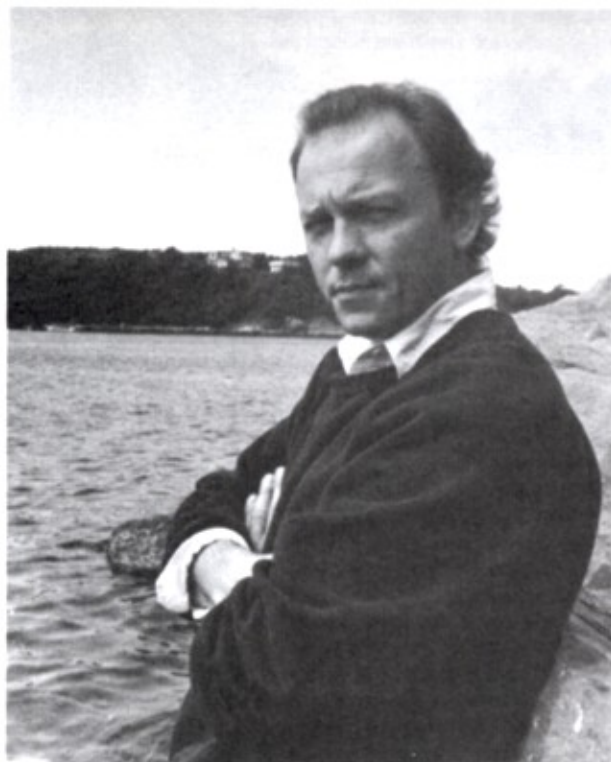
Life Classes: Mary and her grandmother.

seminar celebrating the visit of a German sculptress, illustrated by slides of her recent work: a series of smooth bone- or horn-shaped abstract objects. The lecture, read in translation by another woman as the artist presides in silence, is verbose and obscure, an outpouring of pretentious jargon delivered reverentially. Question time follows, but the audience is intimidated into total silence. At last Mary tentatively raises a series of simple practical questions ('What are these things made of? How big are they? How does she carve them so perfectly?') which are then relayed in translation to the artist, the answers paraphrased by the translator: 'She has carpenters do it . . . she doesn't paint them herself, she has someone else do it.' 'How come they don't tip over?' Mary asks. 'She has a computer design them.' Mary is driven to the ultimate question: 'What does *she* do?' (The artist is becoming increasingly defensive/aggressive). 'She just *thinks* of these things.' The sequence takes up once again the notion of 'conceptual undepinnings,' carrying it to its parodic extreme: the totally alienated art of a sculptress who has no physical contact with her materials. (At the same time, it is important that the objects are beautiful rather than grotesque or merely absurd, and Mary's questions — 'How does she carve them so perfectly?' — implicitly acknowledge this. Nothing in this film is simple.) Although Mary is too diffident to be aggressive, the scene reminds one strongly of the Ursula/Loerke confrontation towards the end of Lawrence's *Women in Love*: the naiveté, which can easily be made to look like stupidity when faced with arrogant pretentiousness, comes across as a healthy and fundamentally intelligent response. In relation to

McGillivray, the scene is a reminder that, if our attention is being drawn to 'conceptual underpinnings,' this is not to negate our sense of the filmmaker's art as a fully human engagement, nor to invite us to neglect the film's flesh and muscle in favour of its skeleton.

6. *Children's Drawings*. Exploring the country home she has inherited from her grandmother, Mary finds some of her own childhood drawings, from before she learnt to 'paint by numbers.' The film does not explicitly connect this to her artistic development, yet it links Mary's art to another of the crucial issues, the sense of the past and its relation to the future. We may also recall the importance of child art in the work of certain key modern artists (Klee, Miro, etc.).

7. *The Television 'Event'*. This sequence draws together so many of the conceptual/thematic threads that I shall have to return to it. The film's ambivalent attitude to the event itself (a semi-organized 'happening' in which the participants, male and female, naked, encased in cylindrical plastic curtains, perform songs associated with some important period of their lives in order to release memories and emotions in a stream-of-consciousness monologue) is epitomized in the presentation of the organizer, intelligent and efficient but bossy and inconsiderate (she also refers to women as 'girls'). If the event is *almost* ridiculous, it is saved by its aim and function (realized especially through Mary herself): the cathartic significance of self-discovery and self-revelation, the exposure without shame of the whole human being, of which the nudity is but the outward sign. Mary uses an avant-garde 'happening' for the expression of, simultaneously, her com-



William McGillivray

mitment to the past and her sense of the need for change. The predominantly positive nature of the scene should effectively counter any suspicion that McGillivray is hostile to modernism or experimental art.

8. *Drawing Earl*. The film's presentation of Earl in many ways parallels that of Eddy in *Loyalties*: both are working-class men of limited education who develop a sensitivity and a kind of rough grace through their ability to love and — more important — respect a woman. It is their ability to learn and adapt that makes possible the generosity with which the films treat them. Earl consistently recognizes Mary's superiority — not in class or education, but in intelligence, awareness and sensibility: her superiority both to him and to their small town environment, the superiority that leads Mary's female peer to see her as a 'snob.' Mary is quite clear on the subject of Earl's limitations, refusing to tie herself to him in marriage, her affection for him having its source in sexual pleasure. Early in the film, when, confronted with the fact of Mary's pregnancy, Earl asks her what she's going to do (adding, 'I wouldn't make much of a . . .'), she promptly responds with 'I know what I'm *not* going to do. I'm *not* marrying you . . . We both know what you do best, Earl. That's why we're where we are.' Yet, while still at the end of the film refusing marriage (which he now wants), she never rejects Earl either, developing a certain respect for him because of his capacity to learn. There are three crucial steps in the progress of the relationship: (a) Earl, by chance, and thanks to his satellite dish, watches Mary's television appearance; in the course of her monologue she refers — with irony and affection — to his 'great family jewels,' linking this to her mother's and her own pursuit of 'the family jewels,' the women's quest for potency. It is this that provokes Earl's departure for Halifax in a spirit that combines pique with admiration. (b) Mary persuades Earl to pose for her in the nude. The film's theme of the liberating effect of nakedness is

thus extended to the male, Earl gradually overcoming his extreme uneasiness at having the 'family jewels' exposed to objective female scrutiny. (c) Earl attends Mary's art exhibition, discovering — with initial horror but swift acceptance — her revelation of his nudity to the public gaze. In the film's overall structure (b) corresponds to Mary's first engagement at the life classes as a nude model and (c) to her naked television appearance.

9. *The Art Exhibition*. Clearly, Mary's art exhibition, consisting exclusively of nude studies of Earl and delightfully billed as a 'One Man Show,' is the culmination of the process I have traced. We are not invited to view Mary as a 'great artist' and the show is not a particular success; the emphasis is on her own personal development, her realization of her talent combined with a 'feminist' deployment of it, the returning of the gaze on to the naked male body. The sketches ('gesture drawings,' as in the life class for which Mary posed) are at once representational and distinctively 'modern' (like McGillivray's film).

One of the film's major concerns (which also happens to be one of mine) is the tension between the need to acknowledge a commitment to the past, to tradition, and the need for radical change. One may begin a discussion of McGillivray's characteristically intelligent exploration of this theme with the song that runs through the film as a leitmotif, and its precise function:

My child is my mother returning
My mother, my daughter, the same.
She carries us all in her yearning,
Our sorrow, our peace, and our pain.

— In itself, the song can be read as a succinct summation of the response of women to oppression throughout the history of patriarchy. Its function in the film is somewhat more complex. Mary and her mother, Mary and her daughter, both are and are not 'the same': the same as the victims of oppression, quite distinct in their responses to it, the responses that their cultural situations make possible: the song's essentialism and resignation are powerfully countered by the progression of the film. Mary's sense of the importance of preserving a continuity with the past is at all points accompanied by her awareness of the need to break with it: indeed, it is her commitment to the past that gives her the strength to take control and determine her own future. The commitment is of course highly selective: Mary identifies (through the song learnt from her grandmother, which she sings interchangeably in English and Gaelic, the 'second language' she claims in her employment interview) with the women's line, both the transgressive mother who left and the non-transgressive grandmother who didn't (but who tells Mary, 'You should have left long ago'). The father, unable to forget the affront to his male ego ('She made a fool of me, Mary, in front of everyone') has tried to obliterate the mother altogether, burning her letters and all photographs of her. Despite his efforts, the generations all come together in the scene after the grandmother's death when Mary and Earl explore the house she has bequeathed: Mary finds photographs of her mother and grandmother, and Marie (left behind in Halifax) is also present on the T-shirt Mary gives to Earl ('You can wear it in the tavern and brag to the boys'). (It is important that she chooses, for the print, a photograph in which Marie appears to be crying: Earl will not be allowed the comforting illusion that everything's just fine.)

This commitment to the women's line, the identification with oppressed women through the centuries, is accompanied

(logically enough) by a firm rejection of the patriarchal nuclear family and the institution of marriage that is its foundation and sanction (if *Loyalties* is equivocal on this issue, *Life Classes* clearly is not). Mary implicitly endorses her mother's abdication (despite the fact that the mother abandoned her as well) and reconfirms her independence by rejecting marriage to her child's biological father (as delivered by Jacinta Cormier, her 'No, Earl' is one of the film's great lines, caustic, affectionate and rock-firm). It is characteristic of the film's (and Mary's) generosity that this rejection of patriarchal authority does not necessitate a rejection of *people*: Earl and the father are both present and acknowledged in the final scene.

McGillivray is not afraid to be 'politically incorrect': at least, the film does not in any way dissociate itself from Mary's rejection of abortion ('You mean, kill it?'). To be anti-abortion, however, is not necessarily to be anti-choice: Mary's response to Earl's suggestion (which is in any case merely his insensitive way of evading responsibility without inconveniencing himself) must be read in the context of a film singlemindedly concerned with a woman's progress towards self-determination. Clearly, the rejection of abortion is linked to Mary's commitment to the female line, and one could argue that this places an unfortunate emphasis on *biological* parentage. For Andrew Britton, this moment is the crux of a film which he reads as 'deeply conservative.' I remain unconvinced that the overall significance would be importantly affected or improved if Marie were an adopted child.

It remains, in this exploration of the film's 'conceptual underpinnings' that has not, I hope, lost touch with its living flesh, to consider the treatment of technology and the media. It seems to me, like every other aspect of the film, highly intelligent ('intelligence' is the word that comes to mind every time I think of *Life Classes*). It is also consistent with the city/country opposition and the film's firm rejection of 'Canadian pastoral' and all that goes with it: Mary, to retain her links with everything in the past that matters to her, will return to her grandmother's house every summer, but her future is in the city. The film opens (after the credits) with the installation of Earl's satellite dish, and it is partly through this that the attitude is defined. The dish accrues strong, positive connotations: it is Earl's means to self-respect (his 'phallus,' if you like, despite its inappropriate shape) in an environment that clearly does not encourage a sense of self-worth. It becomes the community's access to a wider world: it picks up the programme in which Mary participates, broadcasting it to both Earl and her father, forcing the latter to confront the negativity and self-insulation of his own attitude ('He said my mother was a whore'), initiating an entire new development in the former. More important, it becomes the individual's means of serving the community of which he is a member in defiance of capitalist interests and authority: Earl is facing prosecution for using his dish to service more than one house. His friend has built a descrambler, but the American channels 'went crazy,' changing their codes every few seconds. In case we mistake this for Canadian nationalist and anti-American diatribe, Earl is made to add that 'the worst is the RCMP': it's the system and its minions that constitute the enemy. While it is never spelt out, the film's commitment to socialism as well as feminism seems clear enough.

On the one hand, the dominance of the media, the capitalist function of television to fill up leisure and inhibit thought, is presented firmly: the grandmother sitting passively in front of 'the stories,' Earl and his friends boozing it up while watching sports programmes. On the other, the film never shows the slightest inclination to indulge in nostalgic wish-

fulfilments of a return to the simple life in a technology-free 'natural' environment. McGillivray's point is clear: it is not technology that is the enemy but the people who control it; more precisely, the socio-economic system which it is made to serve.

I shall end with a brief consideration of the film's framing credit sequences, but first I want to return (at the risk of some repetition) to the pivotal sequence: the avant-garde television show. It seems to me one of those marvellous sequences that guarantees the authenticity of works of art: the place where 'it all comes together,' where all the disparate themes, as in a piece of complex contrapuntal music, are suddenly revealed as the interlocking parts of a whole. The concept is extremely audacious, the action arguably implausible and potentially risible: another triumph, in fact, of a 'realism of the possible' over a 'realism of the probable.'

All the themes I have explored are simultaneously present, their essential unity made manifest so that a summation of the sequence can stand also as a summation of this article. Mary, naked, sings her song (both in Gaelic and English); her monologue definitively 'places' the men in her life (father, lover) and defines her relationship to them; it also establishes her commitment to her errant mother, the other links in the female line (grandmother, daughter) being 'present' in the song itself. The celebration of continuity is contained within a celebration of innovation (the avant-garde 'happening,' which also defines artistic creation in terms of the human and the personal, in terms of 'nudity' and the refusal of shame, in terms of rootedness in lived experience). The show itself is independent, broadcast via satellite, using advanced technology but outside the control of ideology or corporate capitalism. Finally, it is important that the woman artist who organizes it is *from* New York, and the transmission is intended *for* New York. The film takes in its stride this extreme instance of 'cultural imperialism': if 'the enemy' is not technology, it is also not the United States, but the system that currently controls both (and Canada).

The main function of the opening and closing credits sequences — the only anti-realist moments in the film, McGillivray's nod in the direction of the avant-garde — seems to me to make explicit its self-reflexive aspect: I have suggested that it can be read as McGillivray's artistic testament, as *Ugestu Monogatari* can be read as Mizoguchi's. Its centre is the televised interview with Jacinta Cormier on her role as Mary Cameron, which may derive from the actors' monologues in Bergman's *A Passion*. Aside from that, the obvious opposition (shopping mall complete with liquidation sale of television sets/young (female) violinist playing the tune of Mary's song) brings together a number of the film's concerns, in a manner at once embryonic and schematic (not out of place in a credits sequence).

So, finally, evaluation — though I think it is already evident in what I have written. For me, *Loyalties* is an excellent film, *Life Classes* a wonderful one. Certainly it is the finest Canadian film I have seen, but it doesn't require such a qualification: with Hou Hsiao Hsien's *Daughter of the Nile*, it is one of my two favourite films of the last five years.

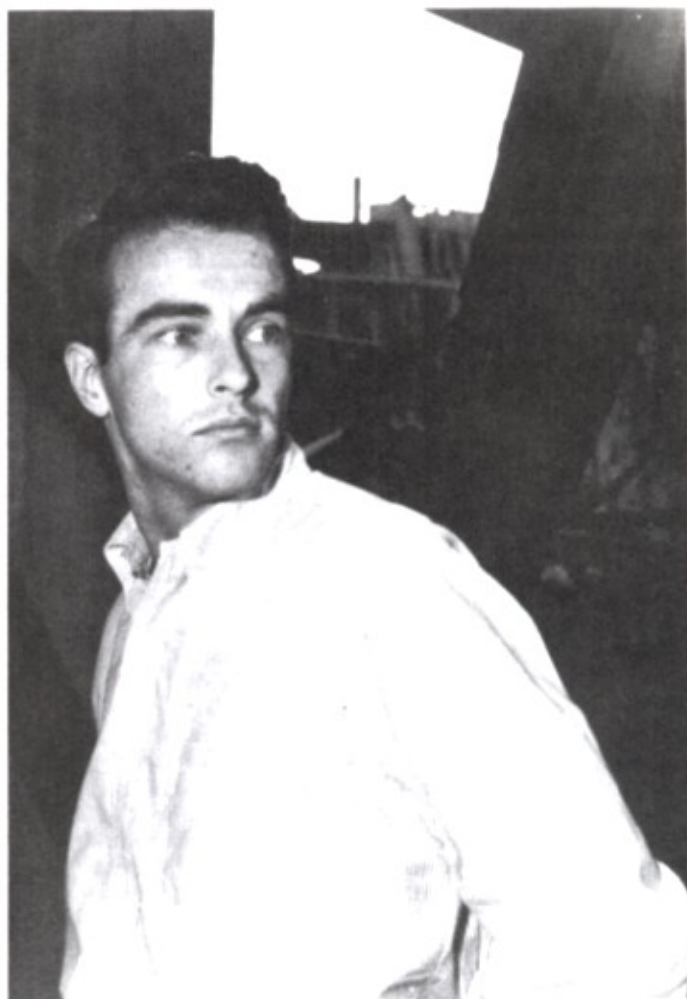
The article is dedicated to Peter Harcourt, but for whom I might never have gone to *Life Classes*.

I taught both the films on which I have written on a course (*Film and Social Change*) at San Francisco State University. I want to thank my students both for their enthusiastic reception (these films have a large potential audience) and for the stimulating discussions that followed the screenings.

And I want to thank Andrew Britton for his total disagreement with me on *Life Classes*. Opposition is always the best stimulant for defining one's ideas.

Montgomery Clift:

A Critical Disturbance



Candid shot, the late '40s.

Introduction

Montgomery Clift is often identified as the first popular male star to display gender defined characteristics, sensitivity and vulnerability, which weren't previously associated with masculine identity. Equally significant, although he incorporated these characteristics into images of the heterosexual male on screen, his sexual orientation off screen was homosexual. Yet, there has been, to my knowledge, no serious critical assessment of Clift's screen persona and presence from either a feminist or gay culture study perspective. While I can think of no specific reasons why Clift should be neglected, it is possible, when considering his star image, to cite numerous aspects of the image that might contribute to his remaining a background figure when selecting candidates through whom to investigate the Hollywood star system. These include: 1) although Clift's film career is contained within the confines of the classical Hollywood cinema, his screen persona wasn't a construction of the studio system; 2) as a social type, Clift's star image relates to that of the post World War II 'rebel' figure which was used to give expression to the contemporary social-sexual tensions and the long standing tradition of the 'brooding' romantic — the image, as a result, embodies a degree of ambiguity which is evidenced in there being, arguably, no single role/film that fully crystallizes his image; 3) Clift was identified as both a star and as an actor's actor. (His performance style reflects, like the films he is predominantly associated with, the immediate post World War II 'realist' aesthetic); 4) essentially, Clift avoided genre films and gravitated toward the social drama film, working with such well-intentioned, liberal-minded directors as Fred Zinnemann, George Stevens and Edward Dmytryk. While their films capably employ Clift's persona, these directors are primarily interested in the interaction between an archetypal figure and the prevailing social system. That Clift embodies a 'sensitive' heterosexual male is the extent to which he is used — the potentially subversive aspects of what he offered, i.e. bi-sexuality, is ignored, the films of these directors giving the impression that there is no possible alternative to the social and sexual regulations of the dominant ideology. In certain films, e.g. *The Search*, *A Place in the*

Sun, *From Here to Eternity*, the Clift characterization seems to offer almost contradictory personas: he is portraying the personification of the 'average' young adult male but simultaneously he is, and Clift's presence encourages the reading, decidedly 'different.'

After his 1956 automobile accident, there was a tendency to associate the image of Clift increasingly with vulnerability, with neurotic behaviour and physical deterioration. In popular memory, co-existing with an image of Clift as sensitive and physically beautiful, there is another image which is highly disturbing — it is an image of a prematurely aged, troubled and even pathetic man. In regard to this dark image, it is worth noting that he appears, in the late stage of his career, in heterosexual films with Marilyn Monroe (*The Misfits*) and Judy Garland (*Judgment at Nuremberg*). Like Clift, these two female stars also have an unsettling side to their images but there is a crucial difference: the aura of tragedy surrounding Monroe and Garland entails their being victims of an exploitive industry and sexist society. In particular, with Monroe, these elements have been relevant to her becoming both a cultural icon and an emblematic figure of female sexuality dying before she lost her youth, beauty and sex appeal; but, in contrast, the Clift tragedy still is attributed to an accident which altered his physical appearance. After his death, Clift's sexual orientation became public knowledge but there remains a withholding of a full recognition that his tragedy involves the degradation and mental anguish he experienced as a gay person living and working in a homophobic society.

Clift's film career begins in the late '40s and ends with his death in the mid '60s. During this time, American society experienced the transitions of the post World War II environment, moved into the reactionism of the '50s and was on the brink of confronting the hippies/-counter culture and the rise of the Black, feminist and gay movements. Clift became a star during a conservative period in which the 'norms' of masculinity held sway despite a recognition in the late '40s that World War II and its aftermath had affected thinking about gender role concepts. As to masculine identity, there was an awareness that men could be capable of the more delicate emotional response as a film like *The Search* indicates. On the other hand, although a slight broadening of the definition of masculinity was accepted, the traditional expectations of

what constitutes a 'real' man were maintained. In his films, Clift is masculine — he embodies traits which are societally perceived as being expressions of a masculine strength: with few exceptions, Clift's roles present him as having principles, courage and determination. (According to Robert La Guardia, *Monty, A Biography of Montgomery Clift*, 1977, Clift feared that he might betray himself on screen projecting a less than masculine identity; living in a period when homosexuality was considered a sickness, he was greatly troubled by his sexual preference). But what is striking about Clift's masculine image, in addition to the feminine characteristics, is that he doesn't display negative masculine strength — the Clift persona isn't authoritarian, aggressive, brutish. He produces, in effect, what could be labelled a positive masculinity. (La Guardia mentions Clift's intervention in shaping his own dialogue and character development in a number of films e.g. *The Search*, *From Here to Eternity*, *Wild River*). It is an image which doesn't negate gender as a concept but such a notion, it seems to me, isn't necessarily a desirable aim; rather, gender needs to be seen as a social construct and not biological in origin.

In the section below, I want to briefly comment on how the Clift persona is presented and used at various stages in his career. I have organized the discussion around headings which I think provide a means to address key issues concerning his star image and, in particular, its relation to the deployment of gender roles in several of his more important films. The following is intended simply as a basis from which a reading of his persona could be developed.

The Westerns

Clift appeared in two Westerns, *Red River* and *The Misfits* and the films are positioned at almost opposite poles of his career; *Red River* was his first film (although its release was held up and Clift's "official" screen debut is in *The Search*) and *The Misfits* is one of his last films. Nevertheless, these films are, for various reasons, fascinating companion pieces. *Red River*, Howard Hawks' first Western, is highly unconventional in that it undermines certain expectations of the genre: for instance, the film sets up a classical showdown and then resolves the conflict through a woman's intervention which is initiated by her firing a gun. John Huston's (and Arthur Miller's) *The Misfits* functions,

in part, as a critical meditation on the genre and, in part, as a lament — the West, in its symbolic sense, no longer exists and with its demise the masculine male image had been jeopardized. In each film, the Clift persona is contrasted to that of a male star, John Wayne and Clark Gable respectively, whose persona represents masculinity in its most traditional form.

In a way, it is difficult to think of *Red River* as a Clift film; it is very much a Hawks film and it is also a Wayne film fully employing his presence and extending the persona beyond that of the uncomplicated hero figure. Still, Clift is the film's moral centre and he is used to mount a critique of Wayne who increasingly is revealed to be a monstrous patriarch. Hawks doesn't make Wayne a villain but he comes close to doing so; during the course of a cattle drive, Wayne becomes villainous because he abuses his position of power, turning into an image of masculine dominance run amok. In contrast, Clift, who is equally committed to the cattle drive, takes a reflective, pragmatic approach and treats the men in a humane fashion. Whereas Wayne used physical violence to intimidate, punish and resolve conflict, Clift refuses it as a means to define himself even when he finally imposes his will. Also, unlike Wayne, Clift admits to being fallible and can openly acknowledge his fears to a woman. With *Red River*, Hawks and Clift construct a hero figure that is very much the antithesis of what the genre's conventions dictate.

In the film's climactic showdown, Wayne forces Clift into a fist fight and gives him a beating before Dru interferes. *Red River* is the first in a series of Clift films, i.e., *From Here to Eternity*, *The Young Lions*, *Wild River*, in which he undergoes a physical beating(s) and endures abuse of various sorts. In most instances, Clift is subjected to bodily pain because he has defied a masculinist authority figure, although in *The Young Lions* he receives the beatings because he's a Jew. In *The Heiress*, *I Confess*, *Indiscretion of an American Wife* and *Lonelyhearts*, the Clift character isn't physically violated but in these films he becomes involved in situations which produce an intense emotional anguish. *I Confess* and to a lesser extent, *From Here to Eternity* present Clift as a Christ-like martyr figure but, in any case, his persona shows a compulsion to experience suffering. The masochistic impulses Clift repeatedly displays give the image a neurotic dimension, making his persona more complex and, in a

sense, undercutting an idealized hero-figure image. It also works to intensify the identification with the 'feminine,' women having been traditionally associated with victimization and masochism.

Marlon Brando and, in particular, James Dean, the two '50s male stars most aligned to Clift, have personas that contain a similarly strong masochistic tendency. In his introduction to *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society*, 1986, Richard Dyer suggests that the popularization of psychoanalysis in the '40s and '50s helped to contribute to the development of the male star who, in projecting his 'inner reality' as a person, revealed a neurotic identity informed by "... Oedipal, psychosexual, paranoid or other crypto-psychoanalytical inflections..." (p. 13). With Clift and Dean, who is said to have had strong homosexual leanings, the masochistic desires may have an intimate connection to a societally induced guilt about their deviant sexuality.

If it seems somewhat inappropriate that Clift, given his physical appearance and prestigious theatrical background, should be playing a Western hero, there is a certain fittingness to his career beginning with a Hawks film. Like most Hawks films, *Red River* is very playful about sex-gender issues. The film, as numerous critics have remarked, has a strikingly direct homoerotic sequence — Clift and John Ireland, a young cowboy who joins the cattle drive, admiringly gaze at each other's guns and toyingly

agree to a shooting contest to see who has the greater prowess. Although the Clift-Ireland relationship isn't developed, the film also gives the Clift-Wayne relationship a homosexual subtext. In the film's concluding sequence, Joanne Dru, who is introduced late in the film, lectures Clift and Wayne on how much they love each other and earlier, Wayne, when realizing that Dru is in love with Clift, offers her money to have a child with him. Ostensibly, Wayne wants a legal heir but the offer suggests that Dru's body will provide access through which he can indirectly express both his anger and love of Clift who has abandoned him. While Dru is a Hawksian woman i.e., independent, assertive, determined, Clift doesn't respond to her in the typical Hawks hero fashion. Although the initial meeting, in which their mutual attraction is tempered by Clift's antagonism, is familiar from previous Hawks films, there is no follow up of the skittish sex-gender tension Hawks imbues his heterosexual couples with. Instead, Dru's approach to Clift is tender; in their major love scene, she conveys her sexual desire through stroking and kissing his face while he is in a supine position. And in the hotel room scene, in which she tells him that Wayne wants a showdown the following morning, Clift's physical response to her presence suggests a combination of sexual and emotional hunger.

It is characteristic of Hawks that, in *Red River*, the masochistic side of the



Red River with John Wayne in his first film.

Clift persona, although already present, is left undeveloped. Here Clift is a young adult male who represents a healthy alternative to the aging Wayne who is attempting to live by and impose on others a primitive masculinist moral code that might have had a place in the old West but is no longer viable as society moves toward the twentieth century. In *The Misfits*, Gable's position is not totally dissimilar to that of Wayne's in the Hawks film, but in Huston's film it is Marilyn Monroe as a life force who comes nearest to being a figure of progressive social change while Clift is used to depict a kind of stunted masculinity which the film juxtaposes to Gable's full blown version. *The Misfits* is a very ambitious, quasi-allegorical film that wants to make a commentary on numerous aspects of contemporary American society and, in particular, the strained relations between the sexes. In the film's conception, Gable and Monroe are used, respectively, as masculine and feminine principles — essentially, if

the two are going to have a future together, Gable has to learn, in addition to tempering his macho identity, to respect Monroe's values and Monroe must acknowledge that loss, pain and cruelty are a fundamental part of human existence. On the one hand, the film uses Monroe to criticize Gable's masculinist ethic but, on the other, it claims that beneath his rugged surface image Gable is vulnerable; for instance, he gets drunk and emotionally falls apart because his grown daughter quickly abandons him after their chance meeting on a Reno street. Also, if Gable is capable of insensitivity to certain living things Monroe, in turn, is insensitive to Gable's fear that he has lost his integrity and can no longer respect himself. Gable used to be a cowboy — a profession that once symbolized a man's manliness. At the film's conclusion, Gable concedes that the cowboy has become an anachronism but he maintains his masculinity/respect by hunting down the mustangs, which take on symbolic

weight for both the Gable and Monroe characters, wrestling the stallion to the ground and then letting it go because he's decided to do so.

The anguished salvaging of Gable's masculinity is abetted by Eli Wallach who, as his friend, also has a masculinist sensibility; and, like Gable, Wallach is both highly attracted to Monroe's sexual presence and perceives that she is more than just a 'blonde.' But, when Wallach realizes he isn't making time with her, he reveals himself to be a misogynist which contributes to Gable's eventual rejection of his friendship. In contrast to Gable and Wallach, Clift doesn't project a strong physical attraction to Monroe; instead, in *The Misfits*, Clift is a no longer youthful adult male who is unable to resolve his Oedipal conflict. While the film presents Clift as heterosexual, the implication is that he hasn't developed a mature male sexual identity. In becoming a bronco rider, Clift has attempted to gain a manly image but the result has been a maso-



The Misfits

chistic exercise. (*The Misfits* somewhat grotesquely capitalizes on Clift's under-going physical abuse and pain which is an aspect of both his on-and off-screen identity. In the film, Clift's progressively battered, bruised and bandaged body is a source of comic relief. Also, arguably the Gable, Monroe and Wallach characters are as 'neurotic' as Clift although the film doesn't acknowledge this. These characters are presented as 'misfits' because they don't accept contemporary 'norms'). In the film's terms, supposedly, as Clift isn't a 'real' man he doesn't understand why Monroe is threatening but, significantly, the intimate scenes between Clift and Monroe contain the film's most positive moments. In their scenes together, Clift and Monroe neither relinquish or privilege their respective gender identities and what develops is the freedom to communicate and empathize. And, it is Clift who, as both an indication of this commitment to Monroe's identity and his own discomfort with the underlying brutality of the endeavour, releases the mustangs knowing that Gable and Wallach see the hunt as elemental to their identities. In *The Misfits* there is considerable confusion about (hetero) sexual desire and gender issues. To an extent, it is to the film's credit that it incorporates Clift's persona and presence but unfortunate that there is a refusal to fully acknowledge his importance to its gender concerns.

Military Films

Of his 17 films, four deal with military life and have Clift playing a soldier: *The Search*, *The Big Lift*, *From Here to Eternity* and *The Young Lions*. In *The Search*, which is set in post-World War II Berlin, Clift is cast as an Army engineer who befriends a young Czechoslovakian boy (Ivan Jandl) and tries to help him find his mother from whom he was separated several years earlier; at the same time, Jandl's mother continues to search for her son despite being told that the attempt is futile and the film concludes with the reunion of the two. The film's project is to attest to the indestructible nature of a mother-child bond and *The Search* is very committed to the notion of a woman's maternal instinct. While the film makes a conventional statement about the female/feminine sex-gender, it also contains, because of Clift's participation, a much more complex presentation of masculine identity. From the outset, Clift expresses a maternal response to the boy. This is shown in

Clift's initial reactions — he offers Jandl food and then takes the boy to his living quarters and, later, buys him clothing. And, in the scene in which he tries to teach Jandl English so that they can better communicate, Clift conducts the lesson in a non-dogmatic manner. The scene also conveys the kind of friendship Clift is offering the boy — he is constructing a bond in which the adult-child division ceases to be a barrier. In doing so, he produces the basis for a deeper emotional rapport which is what develops as Clift becomes increasingly aware of Jandl's complex feelings. In turn, Clift, although continuing to offer the boy his supportive strength, tacitly reveals, when he tries to comfort Jandl who, at last, has confronted the probability of his mother's death, his own delicate emotional responses and needs. As embodied, the relationship between Clift and Jandl defies the film's simplistic assertions regarding sex-gender roles; and, not surprisingly, the film abandons Clift when the reunion becomes eminent.

Zinnemann's *The Search* is heavily influenced by the Italian neo-realist movement; in addition to being shot on location, the film is intended to give the impression of a spontaneous recording of events. Clift, who is introduced about thirty minutes into the film is supposed to be a 'typical' gum-chewing American GI — there is no suggestion that Clift's deeply personal reactions to the boy are other than ordinary. The film's subject matter and the material centred on Jandl's mother is sentimental but Clift's scenes aren't; in part, this occurs because he allows himself to be vulnerable — Jandl gradually becomes a person to whom he wants to give his affection and commitment. And, additionally, Clift counterpoints the film's dramatic situation through an occasional low-keyed humorous reply. In *Red River*, Clift is an intense, controlled presence because Hawks restricts his bodily movements and makes him the least verbal of the film's major characters; in *The Search*, Clift communicates an underlying intense, emotionally nuanced identity through his responsive eyes and mobile facial expressions.

If there is a single film that Clift is identified with it may be *From Here to Eternity*. The film, which is also directed by Zinnemann, provides him with a role that fully employs his persona and presence — almost to the point of doing so in a self-conscious manner. As in *The Search*, he is playing an ordinary guy but, in this film, Clift's qualities consistently imply the extraordinary: his integ-

rity and determination are rock-like and his sensitivity is acute. The latter is given its fullest expression in the close-up shot of Clift's face streaming with tears as he blows taps after Frank Sinatra's death which was the result of the brutal beatings he endured in the stockade. But what is more interesting than the film's direct usage of the feminine in Clift's persona, is that in *From Here to Eternity* his deepest emotional commitments are to other men — the boxer friend he blinded accidentally, and Sinatra, who cultivates his friendship and unguardedly provides Clift with affection and support. Although this was already a factor in *Red River*, *From Here to Eternity* arguably comes closer than any of Clift's other films to asserting that his persona involves a potential to find its greatest gratification through homosexual relations. On the other hand, *From Here to Eternity* is committed to maintaining, through the failures of the Clift-Donna Reed and Burt Lancaster-Deborah Kerr relationships, that there is an insurmountable division between the sexes — a division which is based on notions of gender roles i.e., women don't understand why a man has to act on his beliefs or honour. The film also makes the bogus claim that the military defines what masculinity, in the final accounting, is about.

Women

As the Clift persona doesn't incorporate the contention that masculinity entails a male's domination over another human being, his relations with women tend to be non-constricting, compassionate and supportive of the woman's needs and desires. There are a number of films, e.g., *Red River*, *A Place in the Sun*, *From Here to Eternity*, in which the woman Clift is involved with gives full expression to her assertiveness and determination and does so without endangering the relationship. Also, in his films, women can be both sexual and maternal — in *A Place in the Sun*, Elizabeth Taylor doesn't forfeit her sexuality by offering Clift her protective care; and, Taylor's interaction with Clift leads to her developing, as does Donna Reed in *From Here to Eternity*, a greater sensitivity to her own emotions and feeling. (Although Clift's relationship with Shelley Winters is initiated out of a mutual loneliness, he eventually exploits her sexual attraction to him to satisfy his physical drives. In *The Heiress*, which is the single instance of Clift playing a negative character, his seduction of Olivia de Havilland is simply exploitation).

Elia Kazan's *Wild River* is the film which best exemplifies Clift's rapport with a strong but sensitive and vulnerable woman who, in fact, is the female counterpart to his image. In the film, Clift portrays a government administrator who is supposed to convince Jo Van Fleet, an elderly matriarch, that she must abandon her island property which will be flooded when the Tennessee Valley Authority project is put into operation; while on the island, Clift meets Lee Remick, a widowed granddaughter of Van Fleet's who has two children and is about to remarry for security reasons. In their first meeting, Clift is open to Remick's directness and honesty — on her part, Remick senses that he genuinely is interested in her and feels free to talk to him about her ambivalent feelings concerning the marriage. Clift's responses make it clearly evident that he well understands and identifies with the loneliness and sexual longing she feels and needs to placate. In subsequent scenes, Clift acknowledges these

feelings in himself and the sexual attraction they hold for each other, although he has doubts about making a permanent commitment. Remick is fully aware of this and she, too, recognizes the unlikely probability of their having a future together, but ultimately it is Remick who reacts with the decisiveness that inspires Clift to propose marriage to her. (Paralleling Clift's involvement with Remick, he develops an admiration for Van Fleet because of her resolve, strength and innate dignity). Significantly, Clift's hesitancy doesn't make him appear to be a weak man; rather, it suggests that he is a person who admits to contradictory impulses and recognizes his limitations. In contrast, Remick's suitor, presented as a conventionally decent but unimaginative paternal figure, embodies the societal norms of which Clift's presence provides an implicit critique.

Wild River is the last film in which Clift plays what could be called a romantic hero figure. Considering his

role and the film's subject matter, Clift's persona and presence make for a highly unconventional hero. Consistently, Clift openly admits to his uncertainty and need of help — he asks various members of the town, the secretary in his office, the mayor, how they would go about getting Van Fleet off her property; and when forced into a fist fight with the film's racist villain who objects to Clift paying Blacks the same wages a white person gets, Clift doesn't even know how to defend himself. But, again, the image becomes jarring only if masculinity is equated with authoritativeness and the all-powerful. Those critics who complain that Clift appears neurotic in the film may be unintentionally exposing their belief that to be masculine is to be aggressive.

Conclusion

In his biography, La Guardia says that Clift's presence was influential to shaping the concept of the Hollywood



Montgomery Clift and Lee Remick in *Wild River*.

male star of the '70s; Dustin Hoffman, Robert DeNiro, Jack Nicholson and Al Pacino, he suggests, are the spiritual heirs of Clift's contribution to the cinema. While these actors share with Clift an intensity and emotionally complex presence and often enact characters who challenge institutionalized authority, their brand of masculine identity is of a more traditional nature. Of these stars, Pacino comes the nearest to projecting a sensibility that integrates masculine and feminine characteristics although he is, when compared to Clift, cautious about the degree to which he is willing to express his sensitivity. Also, none of these actors in their films are particularly successful in producing a strong communication with women. They tend to inhabit a man's world and re-inforce the division of the sexes.

Hoffman, DeNiro, Nicholson and Pacino were four of the most distinctive male stars of the '70s and partially at least contributed to a broadening of the concept of filmic masculine identity images. In contrast, the '80s have produced a crude, almost cartoon-like, image of the masculine, with the macho and 'primitive' presence of stars like Sylvester Stallone and Chuck Norris, who, when expressing emotions, do so on a child-like level. More recently, there has been the filmic phenomenon of the adult male who literally regresses to a juvenile identity in order to display



The early '60s: Clift and Monroe at a public function.

his vulnerability. Between these extremes, the '80s male stars e.g., Kevin Costner, Dennis Quaid, Tom Cruise, offer boyishness to suggest that their masculine identity has a sensitive streak. In contrast, Clift never resorted to the boyish to convey his emotional range.

It has been almost twenty-five years since Clift died and during this time no

male star has managed to accomplish what he did. That Clift was able to express a progressive masculine identity in a period of extremely rigid gender identity roles is the more remarkable. Clift not only deserves recognition for his bravery but also for the challenge he offered to the future generations of male stars.

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Imagining Mr. Average



by John McCullough

Throughout the '40s and '50s the image of Gene Kelly represented what can be seen as a remarkable locus of the concerns and the contradictions inherent in the maturation of American patriarchal hegemony. Of course, the '40s were characterised by America's involvement in the war but they also served as a link, keeping in mind the historical development of 19th and 20th century Western patriarchy, between the escalation and prominence in the '20s and early '30s of women's rights issues and the entirely reactionary, family- and male-identified period of the '50s. The period of heightened feminist activity had been subsumed, during the depression, in efforts to resurrect the capitalist status quo and while the erosion of male security is the featured knowledge of the years directly preceding the war (the 'Forgotten Man' syndrome) the continuation of pre-depression social stratification systems maintained a situation which ensured strengthened patriarchal dominance. We may think of the NRA or the TVA (or even, bless his initials, FDR) when we think of dustbowl America, and their

Kelly as dancer-turned-farmhand (*Summer Stock*)

ostensible goal of aiding the poor, but this invariably translated into re-establishing the rich. If the economic depression damaged the elite, certainly the poor were reduced to the most tenuous of existences and highly susceptible to the abusive and reactionary policies featured in the '50s' 'perfection' of consumerism.

That this development was entirely dependent upon the subjugation of women (while packaged and sold as freedom, of course) clearly had consequences as to the image of women and their social participation. Ultimately, the '40s war effort became inextricably linked to the orchestration of numerous social policies of repression and entrenchment which secured Woman, women and the feminine as marginal, as negation, as the unspoken in a male-dominated world. Despite widespread performance in industry during the war, women were directed back to 'women's jobs' in industry and the domestic sphere during the '50s'; war-time technology was marketed (in one of the most significant periods of American consumerist development) towards that domestic sphere; the traditional family unit was promoted as essential; and the stability of this family unit was believed to be realized in the triangular schematic of puritan morality, full employment for fathers and the creation of a loving home for children by mothers. Ultimately this reads as a manifesto for the proliferation and maintenance of separate sphere society featuring unquestioned male authority and pervasive oppression of women.

Gene Kelly, as a '40s and '50s pop image, is necessarily part of — in fact, a mediator in — this history and, as I intend to point out, the image embodies at one time or another the various male stereotypes characteristic of the period. While the 'neurotic' (popularized in the film noir, for instance) is present early, this passes through a Svengali/father phase to an eventual satisfaction with the notion of Kelly as fixed and unchallenged — the icon. Clearly, this trajectory outlines the basic re-instatement of patriarchal social 'law'/behaviour operating in the period and suggests that the image was simplistically dogmatic and not complex enough to embody the inherent contradictions and conflicts of the period: a prescriptive image as opposed to a descriptive/reactive one resonant with the tensions as well as the trajectory of its surroundings. I suggest, though, that works such as *The Pirate* and the other films with Minnelli, and the anomalous (in terms of genre or auteur considerations) *Margorie Morningstar*, present situations and characterizations which are riddled with the difficulties of the specific historical period. Even the assumption of icon status suggests that the image has finally become too disturbed by its inability to avoid the contradictions inherent in its existence.

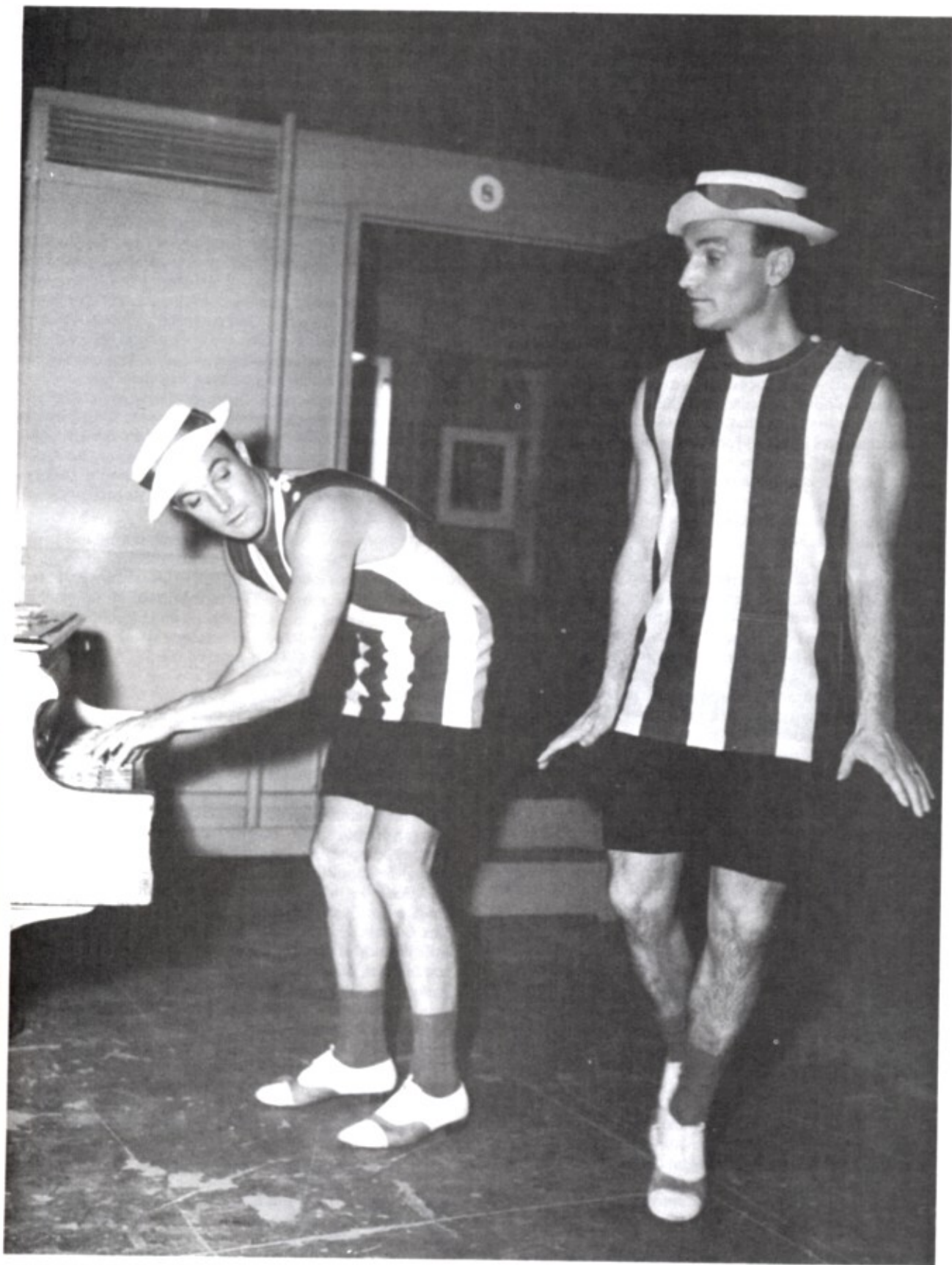
Before studying the star image of Gene Kelly there are two points which I think should be considered as context. Initially, despite a large proportion of dramatic roles in his career, Kelly is regarded as a 'song and dance man' and, as such, a perception of him as a star image requires a consideration of the musical genre. Specifically, Kelly was connected to significant transformations of the genre's form during the '40s and '50s, notably the maturation of the integrated musical.² At its core, the musical is concerned with celebrating romantic love. The integrated form, as a classical development in the genre, focuses on this concern via its heightened valuation of the 'number,' in effect the creation of spectacle. In the integrated musical, romantic love and spectacle are symbiotic: finding love is the justification for spectacle and the spectacle is the physical manifestation of what is perceived to be the feeling of love. The outcome of this relationship approaches an effect of stasis whereby the anticipated

purity of romantic love is fixed as something eternal and yet ephemeral — only those in true love, and only those who participate in the rites of spectacle, are allowed access to it.

Thus, whereas genres such as the western and the screwball comedy (both particularly popular at the time the integrated musical made its appearance in the late '30s and early '40s) generally work towards installing the romantic heterosexual couple as the essential basis for Western ideology (and, hence, such concomitant extensions as the 'happily married couple,' the family, consumerism and patriarchal authority), the integrated musical, with its linkage of romantic love to spectacle, tends to perceive marriage and family as a bourgeois defilement of such love. That is, even those westerns and screwballs critical of America — those which see the American Dream as a hellish nightmare — are nonetheless involved in projects which situate marriage as narrative conclusion. Clearly this seeming contradiction suggests the looming presence of the morality-code, but what is fascinating about the integrated musical is its insistence on fixing the moment of 'love' (not specifically marriage) as the plot's climax. Even the integrated musical's predecessor, the backstage musical, can be seen as defilement of romantic love as narrative closure is dependent upon business complications being solved wherein the show can go on — and the show was always as important as love and often took precedence. The *Gold Diggers* series is clearly an example of this tendency as Ruby Keeler and Dick Powell's romances are usually overshadowed by the show finale while their own trajectory is always towards marriage. By way of contrast, the integrated musical promoted the impulse of romantic love as its primary concern and, thus, became the target of criticism which attacked its inherent artifice and promotion of the fantastic.

Fred Astaire is the archetypal male star of the integrated musical, at least up to the mid-40s. As Robin Wood has stated,³ the Astaire image is crucial in several respects to the relative subversiveness (as read against-the-grain) of the integrated musical. The most interesting of these for this discussion is that Astaire's characters' single marital status (and that of his partner) was the key to sustaining the possibility of romantic love. Any perception that the couple were bound by marriage (as in *The Story Of Vernon And Irene Castle*) compromised romance to institution (undermining the fantasy of stasis) and suggested that romantic love was simply the first step into a distastefully ordinary and mediocre existence. Significantly, this undermining, as in the story of the Castles and later *The Barkleys of Broadway*, often translated into commercial failure.

Another aspect of Astaire's films which distanced the narratives from daily concerns (and thus fostered the 'believability' of romantic love) was the introduction of aristocratic iconography. That is, as the integrated musical was conceived, its iconography became less and less associated with that of the backstage musical as the spectacle of romantic love could take place anywhere — but much more easily if perceived within an aristocratic environment. The iconography which arose from this style of musical, then, was that of formal wear (top hat and tails, white gloves and cane) or, if in the role of a performer, high quality sports coats and trousers topped with a panama. *The Band Wagon*, from its title cards to narrative, is shot through with this type of iconographic reference. The effect is similar, in fact, to that which is realized in a film like *Bringing Up Baby* which, because of the freedom accorded the narrative by placement within an aristocratic setting, can present lifestyle alternatives which would be untenable in the context of other class environments. (As well, there is the perception, often used to



Kelly and his brother Fred.

'explain' the phenomenon, that Depression audiences felt at ease with stories of the upper-class while attempting to ignore their own bitter realities.)

Throughout all Astaire's films 'formal' dress is a given (except in his debut *Dancing Lady* with Joan Crawford, wherein Astaire can be seen bare-legged or episodic presentations such as the "Limehouse Blues" number from *Zeigfeld Follies* in which he is poor and oriental — interesting to the degree that it suggests a sense of really how inflexible *Kelly's* image was). Twenty-five years after the introduction of the aristocratic Astaire image in *Flying Down To Rio* it remains intact in films like *Daddy Long Legs*, where Astaire is ascribed a class role (industrialist) which asserts formal dress codes, *Funny Face* which situates Astaire as an American high fashion photographer in Paris whose dress is debonair and elegant and *Silk Stockings* in which Astaire's role as an American theatrical producer (again, in Paris) determines his elegance and fashion-sense (which, of course, is thematically significant in the process of corrupting Communist Ninotchka). Though discussing Astaire's clothes as aristocratic, I want to clarify that this does not necessarily mean that his character is always (or ever) an aristocrat but that the attempt is being made to experience and appropriate the privilege of that class designation. A telling scene occurs in *You Were Never Lovelier* when Astaire (an unemployed hoofer) courts aristocrat Rita Hayworth as a knight in shining armour and, when that fails, crawls from the armour dressed in tails.

Kelly's introduction into the Hollywood musical, then, can be seen to be bound by certain definitions which Astaire's status and success had determined. The thematic and iconographic constraints mentioned above are crucial, but so is the issue of dancing style which, eventually, became central to the difference between their star images. Whereas Astaire's dancing fulfilled the aristocratic tendencies which his character signified, Kelly presented a repertoire which was, on the whole, more inclined to the portrayal of athletic, vigorous and determinedly masculinized characters. For instance, in *The Band Wagon* Astaire claims that he is *not* Marlon Brando while Kelly, in *Les Girls*, adeptly personifies (and parodies) Brando. This, of course, presented the possibility of development away from the aristocratic iconography which typified the early form of integrated musicals and implied that musicals could address narratives from any class in various social situations. Given this flexibility, the 'fantasy' for which musicals received heavy criticism could be something more than a voyeuristic venture into the world of the upper-class. The limit of this flexibility, though, was that romantic love, as an alternative priority to marriage and family, in any setting other than an exotic or 'special' one became laughable given the lived experience of the audience. Clearly, although Kelly helped dispel the specific image of the dancer as aristocrat (Kelly rarely wore anything that could be constructed as upper-class formal) and was responsible for expanding the number of types of characters played by dancers, they all remained, to some extent, defined by their 'special' status: military personnel, a pirate, a movie star. Beyond this, the integrated musical remained structurally intact as developed with Astaire and Rogers, trading on the continued popularity of the romantic love/spectacle symbiosis. Kelly's role in re-evaluating the spectacle, though, informs my second consideration which I feel is necessary in contextualizing a discussion of Kelly's star image.

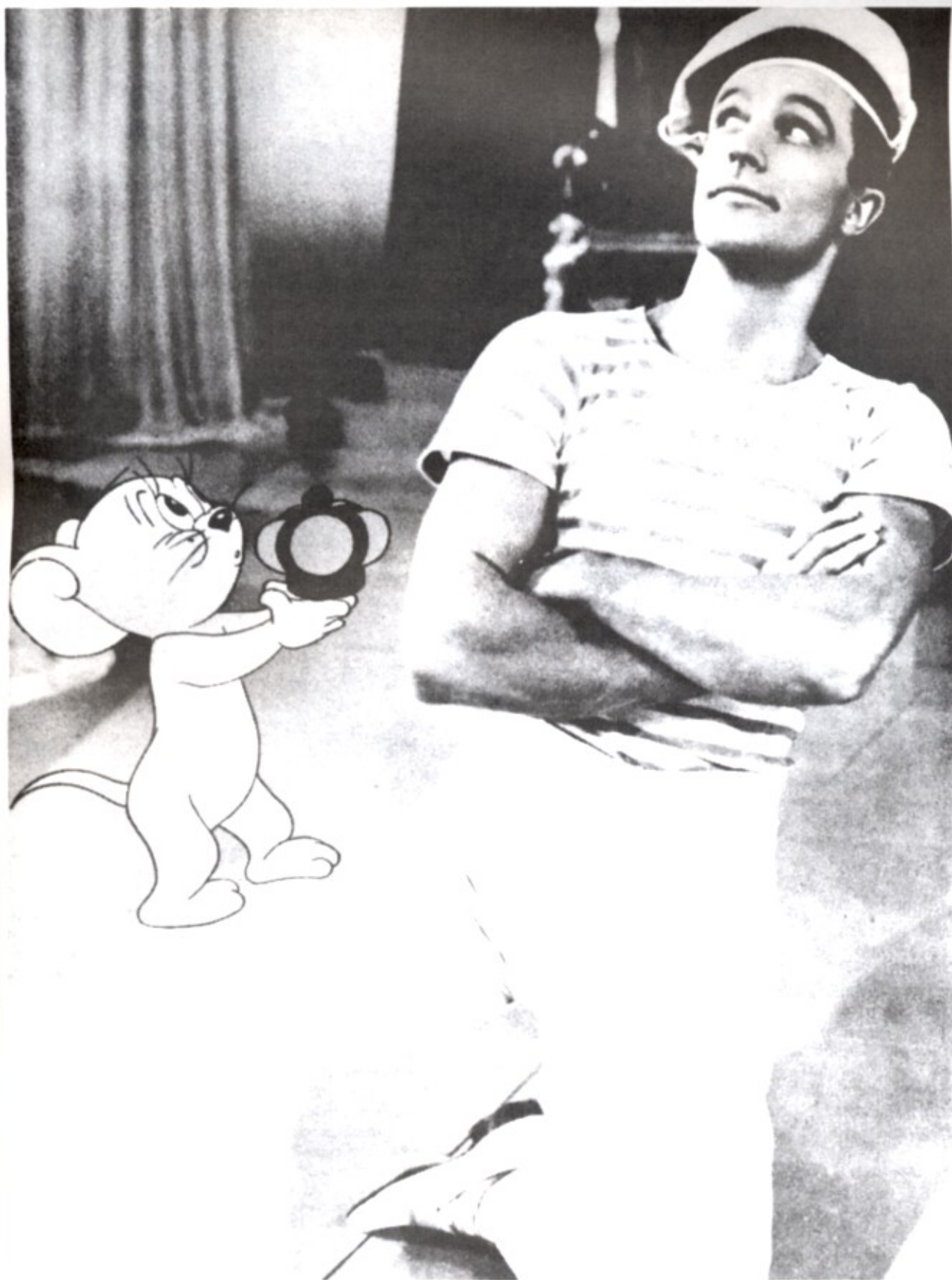
Specifically, although Astaire's involvement with the filmmaking process was largely as a figure in front of the camera, Kelly moved quickly from dancer to choreographer

to director and this had implications for the development of the spectacle and the crystallization of his star image. Concurrently, Kelly's home studio, MGM, was signing numerous musical talents, some of whom were eager to expand the expressive characteristics of the musical. The most successful projects to result from this abundance of talent were completed within the context of the Freed Unit, a loosely-knit work group which produced eleven of the films in which Kelly danced. What is interesting during this period is that the 'artistic' success of the entire picture was closely associated with the achievements of the spectacle(s) within. For instance, *Anchors Aweigh* was promoted as the "most grandiose MGM musical of all time" (from an ad in *Photoplay*) and this was linked to the fact that the three central 'numbers' were quite technically extraordinary (especially that which has Kelly dancing with the animated Jerry the Mouse). Similarly, *On The Town*, *An American In Paris* and *Singin' In The Rain* were promoted and were successful (and are remembered) largely on the merits of their spectacles. *An American In Paris* is an acute example of the development in the Freed Unit of an obsessive regard for the spectacle. Both Vincente Minnelli and Kelly were intrigued by the possibility of staging a ballet in the context of a narrative and proceeded with what turned out to be the most expensive production number, to that point, ever put on film — the total cost being \$450,000 (Hirschhorn, p. 203).

Kelly's presence, on a directorial level, during this period in the musical genre is crucial to an understanding of the seeming petrification which occurred to his star image. In fact, as Kelly became more and more engrossed in the planning and production of films, the publicity and promotion resources which MGM controlled increasingly ignored him (owing largely to the fact that Kelly was, by then, a known quantity and had maintained an image that was not in need of 'correction' by publicists). Kelly's trajectory through the '50s, though, required mediating 1) the demise of the studio system and 2) the termination of his long-term contract — events which, on the one hand, limited the possibility of realizing the big-budget musicals with which Kelly had become increasingly associated and, on the other, offered Kelly the potential freedom to choose roles he found interesting (an opportunity which was ineffectively managed). Further, despite the apparent control (accrued vis-a-vis his status) he should have had in choosing projects during the '50s, Kelly seems to have sacrificed degrees of freedom for chances to focus on pet projects — projects over which he was to have a significant degree of directorial control but little latitude in terms of image creation. Films like *An American In Paris*, *Singin' In The Rain*, *Invitation To The Dance*, *Brigadoon*, and *It's Always Fair Weather* situate Kelly in what was, by then, the relatively familiar context of the spectacle as well as identifying his image with the status of director or choreographer — a complication which, it seems to me, tends to push the filmmaking process (who has control?) into an anxious liaison with star image creation.⁴ There is little doubt that Kelly's image suffered as a result, becoming in the process one which was rigidly fixed as opposed to evolving.

ALL-AMERICAN LOW-LIFE

The interest I have in Kelly's star image is inspired by its peculiar positioning in regard to patriarchal masculinity and authority. Specifically, it is repeatedly an image of hysteria and anxiety: clearly, patriarchal masculinity is cracking at the seams. In *Brigadoon* (1954), for instance (although it is a late example, it is useful in this discussion), the sense of



Anchors Aweigh



Low-Life redeemed in love (with Garland in *For Me and My Gal*).

alienation and distance I feel as a spectator is directly a result of my reaction to Kelly's portrayal of a disillusioned patriarch-in-training (Tommy Albright) who is so disenchanted, in fact, that he wishes to opt out of his (and our) system entirely. What is fascinating is how utterly entropic the film seems: that unless one lives in romantic fantasy (the musical?) society (ie. the New York supper scene) is oppressive, irritating and pointless. Of course this reading is bound with the recognition that, on the one hand, the Brigadoon fantasy is simply a reworking of the Romantic tradition of celebration of an earlier society (as though it had no connections to our own) and thus becomes an extension of post-war liberal-humanism (subscribed to by both the star and the director of the film) while, on the other hand, it operates, by implying that Elaine Steward's Jane Ashton (Albright's New York fiancée) is the focus/source of all perversions of society, as a misogynist address which situates modern woman as man's curse. In this dynamic Cyd Charisse/Fiona Campbell, as enigma and dream, comes to represent what men/man/-history really wants and needs. In fact, an interesting reading of the film (which I will only suggest here) would be to investigate how the two New Yorkers (Albright and Van Johnson's Jeff Douglas) find in Brigadoon a life which is not only imbued with a 'primitive simplicity' but also a thorough sexism which ensures that women are the servants of men. With their integral involvement in the hunt and death of the rebel (who wants to escape from Brigadoon) Albright and

Douglas indicate their enthusiasm (sometimes hysteric in tone) to fight for the continued existence of a monolithic, mystic (neo-fascistic?) state. So, while the Kelly image may suggest the insecurity of post-war masculinity, and be seen in this light to be 'progressive,' the dominant tradition (the ethos of post-war reconstruction) is ultimately upheld and defended.

It might be useful now to return to a more general discussion of the Kelly image; specifically, what does he represent? Initially, I think there is a consensus in describing Kelly as an All-American *type* who, although primarily associated with dance and the musical film (not a masculinized genre like the western, for instance), is typically masculine. His physical appearance, his athleticism and his energy (the stuff of the work ethic) all contribute to consideration of the image as All-American male. Further, the heterosexual-liberation world he inhabits and usually dominates (both on and off screen) substantiates his All-American male image. To Kay Proctor, in *Photoplay*:

"I'm just Joe Average," he said. "I've got a wife, a kid, a car and a house. There's a million guys like me."
(*Hey Irish!*, May 1943)

This negotiation of the ordinary/extraordinary axis is a feature which Dyer, in particular, addresses in his work and I will return to it shortly. Before that, though, I want to expand on the comments regarding my interest in Kelly,

especially the notion that, in reading his image, there develops a link between fulfilling the demands of American maleness and the ultimately impossible/neurotic position, vis-à-vis progressive social change, which that entails. Such a reading is similar to that discussed by Britton in relation to Jimmy Stewart:

The meaning of the Stewart persona might be said to be — 'if you are the perfect, middle-class, heterosexual American male you go mad' . . . (p.6)

Despite Britton's qualifications (i.e. the Mann and Hitchcock films seem to indicate this type of image ultimately never undermines Stewart's traditional image), the nature of my understanding of Kelly is closely related. For instance, although the Kelly image connotes stability, rationality, justice and hard work, the majority of the film roles which Kelly plays contain contradictions to that image which lead to uneasy consideration of the principles of the All-American male type. Briefly, stability becomes obsessive/possessive control; rationality and justice become a sadistic authoritarianism; and hard work becomes compulsive fixation/fetishization. As well, non-masculinized qualities such as sensitivity and humility become, in the films, associated with insecurity and self-doubt. In fact, one of the recurrent themes in the Kelly image which is generally disregarded is his insecurity, although in every film I will discuss the narrative plays heavily on this trait. The point here is that, if Kelly is really just one of the "million guys" he describes, exactly what does this imply about American males?

Kelly's image, upon his arrival in Hollywood, was initially determined by his success as Joey Evans in the Broadway production *Pal Joey* (1940) which situates Kelly as 1) a performer, 2) a white, middle-class heterosexual American male and 3) a barely redeemable low life.⁵ That image is carried, almost wholesale, into his film debut *For Me And My Gal* (1942) wherein his hoofer's drive to success is dependent upon perversion of every aspect of American middle-class integrity. As John Russell Taylor comments in *The Hollywood Musical* (about Joey Evans, specifically, but equally applicable to *Gal's* Harry Palmer):

. . . the personality is not altogether appealing. There is sometimes the feeling that the charm is laid on a little too thickly, that the smile is a trifle synthetic, that . . . he may like himself just a fraction too much. (p. 35)

The other film of this early period which casts Kelly as decidedly undesirable is *Christmas Holiday* (1944). In it Kelly plays an unrepentant murderer whose psychologically confused attitude to the roles of mother, son, husband, wife and lover and their respective positions on the good/bad axis brings focus to impulses which have, in a sense, been previously identified with the personae of Joey Evans and Harry Palmer. Specifically, Joey, Harry and Robert Manette are all characterized by their jealousy and fear of women and their distrust of men who love and are loved by women. Thus, anxiety (especially the threat of symbolic castration) becomes a central aspect of the relationships between Joey and Vera Simpson, Harry and Judy Garland's Jo Hayden and Robert and his mother and wife. In the musicals, the tensions are resolved via a narrative which culminates in the romantic love/spectacle symbiosis whereby heterosexual union, the necessary installation of the male as active 'lead,' both demands and represents the pardoning of aberrant behaviour (which is relatively extreme in the case of Harry who damages his hand to avoid being drafted; this just as America had entered WWII⁶).

The strategy in *Christmas Holiday*, a film-noir, is quite the

opposite and it is a distinguished feature of some of Kelly's dramatic roles to pointedly expose the nature of his troublesome All-American maleness. In fact, the film is remarkable for its laying-out of a scenario which is analytically rewarding if considered from a Freudian perspective. Specifically, I will refer to the essays *A Special Type of Object-Choice Made By Men* (1910) and *On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love* (1912) which offer observations useful to a discussion of Robert Manette's 'neurotic' character.⁷ I think reference to Freud in the context of Kelly's image is defensible for two reasons: 1) Freud's theories had become popularly disseminated in America during the '40s and '50s, the time of Kelly's prominence, and their influence was extensive throughout the Hollywood industry (this relates to Britton's recognition of the prominence of what he terms the '40s Freudian feminist texts) and 2) Kelly, by virtue of his foregrounding of sexuality and fantasy in the musicals and repressed sexuality in the dramas, begs a Freudian interpretation.

The immediate points to be made come from the first essay and they suggest a pattern by which Manette makes choices as to his love-object. That is, his pursuit will be constituted by a) his desire for an unattainable woman ("... the person in question shall never choose as his love-object a woman who is disengaged . . . but only one to whom another man can claim right of possession . . ."), b) an attraction to an extremely attainable woman ("love of a prostitute"), c) an insistence on fidelity and d) the consideration of the love affair as a process of rescue of the woman. Despite the seeming incompatibility of these features, Freud postulates that the 'neurotic' male finds these disparate desires satisfied by one figure — the mother. In fact, 'normal' sexual behaviour is conditioned similarly but in the 'neurotic' "the libido has remained attached to the mother for so long, even after the onset of puberty, that the maternal characteristics remain stamped on the love-objects that are chosen later, and all these turn into easily recognizable mother-surrogates." Given this perspective, the compulsive affection Manette shows for his mother is intriguing despite the fact that his neurosis is portrayed via a typically simplified Hollywood equation: men's excessive love of mother=sissy=neurotic threat to society. The thriller tradition is thoroughly encoded with these conceits and the consistency of meaning is emphatically maintained by a pattern of repetition, variation and allusion throughout film history evolved from *Scarface* to *White Heat* to *Psycho* to something like *Dog Day Afternoon*. What is interesting in *Christmas Holiday*, beyond Manette's fixation on mother-surrogates, is the development of the Deanna Durbin character/s and its/their relevance to the second Freud essay.

In linking the two essays it becomes apparent that, given an environment in which behaviour is consistently socialized, Freud perceived male frustration and confusion as an unavoidable outcome of sexual relationships. Following from the first essay, where 'neurosis' was the result of attempts to focus all desire on one object (the mother), the second essay suggests that a man necessarily isolates 'affectionate' (love) and 'sensual' (erotic) motivations/objects.

He is assured of complete sexual pleasure only when he can devote himself unreservedly to obtaining satisfaction, which with his well-brought-up wife, for instance, he does not dare to do. This is the source of his need for a debased sexual object, a woman who is ethically inferior, to whom he need attribute no aesthetic scruples, who does not know him in his other social relations and cannot judge him in them.

Thus, when the love and erotic drives are seen to be contained within a single object (the mother) the 'neurotic' evolves. In the film, this dynamic is foregrounded by doubling the characters played by Deanna Durbin. Abigail is the innocent Robert marries and subsequently tortures while Jackie is the 'dark' woman who fascinates Robert. Although they are contained within the same body, it is only when Robert — as husband, recipient of affection (love) — is absent that Jackie (as his erotic fulfillment) can emerge from Abigail. That is, Abigail would destroy her love affair with Robert were she to perform for him as Jackie — heart of the erotic in the film — as this would place him in an irreducible conflict of desires. The implication is that both love and erotic satisfaction are inherent in a single object although socialization processes regularly deny recognition of this possibility. Both women represent simultaneously what is desired and what is threatening: Abigail is motherly, socially proper, but stands as a threat of sensual denial while Jackie represents erotic freedom but threatens social propriety. In each case, the threat is ultimately one of symbolic castration and the source of that threat can be traced to mother-identified impulses — attachment and denial. The issue is particularly crucial when Manette finds Abigail signified as Jackie, the night-club singer (read prostitute): despite his desire (both as husband and as a threatened male) to destroy Jackie, he is equally attracted to her — she is the object of his erotic drive. Given that Jackie shares, with Robert's mother, qualities of aloofness, sense of control and rejection of male dominance, the sexual thematic implications of *Christmas Holiday* come to feature 1) the 'neurotic' developments inherent in over-valuation of the mother as erotic object, 2) the subsequent (socialized) impossibility of mother-surrogates to provide the union of love and erotic desires and 3) the ultimate trajectory towards emasculation (and, in Freud's words, "psychic impotence"). This thematic, of course, characterises much of Hollywood's output and particularly numerous Hitchcock films but for Kelly, as a musical star, the implications of this development were troublesome and it is interesting to consider the tactics used to establish an 'acceptable' image through manipulation of publicity and promotion.⁸

Early in Kelly's film career, the manufactured image is centred on his Irish heritage. The most obvious points made in this context concern "the luck of the Irish" and "Irish charm" (from Proctor's *Photoplay* article). Specifically, Kelly's arrival in Hollywood is perceived to be a thing of luck (or lack of "paying dues") and, yet, there is no outright condemnation of this, only a reference to its excusability based upon his pleasant personality and charm. In order to align him with traditional Hollywood, comparisons are made:

In many ways he is a brunet version of Fred Astaire with the same liquid grace and perfect timing in his dancing and the same shy manner, quiet bearing and mild mien. (Proctor)

The obviousness of the fabrication becomes apparent when one realizes that, at the time of the article, Kelly-on-film consisted of only one musical, *For Me and My Gal*, in which he plays a relatively second-rate vaudevillian hoofer whose dancing is barely comparable to what Astaire had achieved. In fact, there is almost a tone of desperation in Proctor's article which suggests the difficulty in assimilating Kelly to the Hollywood musical, let alone the Hollywood community. In a sense, Proctor's frustration is totally valid to the degree that the management of the early stages of his career was peculiar and, until 1944 (when he was loaned-out to Colum-

bia) Kelly, in all practical terms, was only tenuously associated with the film musical.⁹

By and large, Kelly's early publicity (whether it features his Irish-ness or not) is distinguished by its attempts to define him as 'ordinary.' His upbringing in Pittsburgh is used repeatedly to fulfill this function as are the reports of fights he had with neighbourhood bullies who chastised his enrolment in dancing classes — this, in fact, brings together various strands of the image: his ruggedness and masculinity, the 'fighting Irish' background and the notion of the Irish household controlled by a domineering mother (who sent her son to dance school). Thus, 'ordinariness' is largely perceived to depend upon Kelly's masculinity and it is of interest to note the degree to which the image and the person emphasize its presence. For instance, the reference to a "brunet Astaire," to Kelly's "athletic dancing" and the fighting for the right to dance all tend to notify the public of Kelly's aversion to effeminate behaviour. (Briefly, it's worthwhile to consider the ideological ramifications of gender designation at this point. Whereas Astaire was successful in parlaying his dancing-style — that which was broadly signified as effeminate performance — into considerable esteem and popularity by way of appropriating aristocratic iconography Kelly, uneasy with the effeminate designation of dancing, approached the situation quite differently: he chose to masculinize his image through an alternative dancing style and a preference for middle- to lower-class characterizations. Without pursuing all the vectors involved here it is interesting that the popular assumptions underlying them are 1) that masculinity is imagined as a commensurate lower-class attribute and 2) that the upper-class, while successful in romantic pursuits, is ultimately ephemeral and effeminate. The mythic tale of the powdered courtiers perpetually in love and squared-off against the band of swarthy proles who know nothing of love, only work and death, is once again played out. But, as always, Astaire is ambivalent here as he tends to obscure the power machinations activated by the various class and gender significations: if Kelly wishes to remain the poorboy at the party — if he gets invited at all — it is Astaire who will be the eager courtesan).

The development of the 'heel' or 'low-life' image in Kelly's repertoire is deflected succinctly by articles which support the view of Kelly as a healthy, middle-American family man. Two articles in *Photoplay*, in particular, take the restoration of Kelly's All-American image as their agenda. The first, in February 1944, entitled "If You Were Gene Kelly's Houseguest," suggests that, while hectic, a weekend visit would be filled with amiable conversation and pedestrian activity. The second, in June 1944, "It's Like This — To Be Mrs. Gene Kelly" (written by Betsy Kelly), anticipates the public anxiety which Kelly's role as Robert Manette in *Christmas Holiday* would instigate. In it, Betsy (who has already been portrayed in other publicity spots as conventional, cheerful and trustworthy) endorses her husband's scruffiness — a role in *The Cross Of Lorraine* (1943), specifically — as "wonderful." As well, she assuringly reveals: "My husband isn't an Irishman given to black moods." The accumulated effect of these two articles is 1) to portray Kelly as the thoughtful, gentle and faultless father/husband figure of a traditional family, 2) to establish that the Kelly household was "the gayest, brightest and most topsy-turvy household in all of Hollywood . . . and by all accounts the most informal . . ." and 3) that, owing to a combination of these facts, the Kellys were sociable, liberal and model Hollywood residents who, despite their 'special' status, eschewed the caprice expected of stars. Much of this, of course, is simply an extension of the 'ordinary' image

which had been applied to Kelly himself in earlier publicity (eg. Proctor in *Hey Irish!*: "Unlike Astaire, Gene is no fashion plate. Candidly, he calls himself 'a walking slum.'"). But this rather communal attempt at 'correcting' the image (including the studio, the magazine, Kelly's wife and friends and Kelly himself) is significant in that it provides the bridge which is required to fulfill the characteristics of romantic lover which will inform the Kelly image through much of the rest of his career.

ANXIETY AND THE ROMANTIC LOVER

With *Cover Girl* (1944), Kelly became an established musical film star highly regarded for his inventive choreography and dancing as well as his ability to portray a romantic lover. That is, until Kelly's performance as Danny McGuire, the ideal (and really *only*) romantic lead in the integrated musical was Astaire. As discussed in my introduction, Kelly expanded the possibilities of characterization of the romantic lover and, it seems apparent, the most significant development was the consideration of the anxiety and insecurity inherent in such a character. This is not to suggest that Astaire's characters were wholly secure in their roles, but their suave behaviour usually indicated control, relaxation and surety in the presence of disorder. For instance, the number "A Fine Romance" in *Swing Time* is one of several 'humiliation scenes' in Astaire's catalogue of courtships with Rogers, yet his reaction is nowhere as extreme as Kelly/McGuire's in *Cover Girl* which includes condemnation of competitors (Otto Kruger/John Coudair), condemnation and reevaluation of himself, and a period of isolation and aloofness (feeling sorry for himself). (In a sense, this strategy works well for the musical as the reunion of the lovers demands an extraordinary spectacle to reassert the "right-ness" of their relationship). The extremes of characterization can be attributed to Kelly, specifically, as he oozes vulnerability and insecurity as well as preferring an "over-the-top" dance style. A case in point is the "Alter Ego" dance which 1) presents Kelly as different from Astaire (both psychically and physically), 2) deepens the feeling of self-doubt which is 'expressible' in the musical (remembering that the musical is traditionally a 'happy' genre), 3) develops an increased anticipation of the spectacle's power of reclamation and 4) designates Kelly as *still* insecure (a spill-over from the image construed in *Pal Joey*, *For Me And My Gal* and *Christmas Holiday*). Time and time again, Kelly's characters pass through this period of disillusion and love-lost-ness (a concise example is Esther Williams/Katherine's face-image and baseball game memories superimposed over his period of loss in *Take Me Out To The Ball Game*) and this is a tactic used almost exclusively with Kelly and not with Astaire — in *The Band Wagon* a similar narrative develops but Astaire is anything but defeated; in fact, he becomes resolute and aggressive.

The films which situate Kelly as a romantic lover are, by and large, also successful in establishing him as an inventive technical presence. "Alter Ego" from *Cover Girl*, "La Cumarsita" and "The King Who Couldn't Dance" from *Anchors Aweigh* (1945), "Slaughter On Tenth Avenue" from *Words And Music* (1948), "A Day In New York" from *On The Town* (1950) and "The American In Paris Ballet" (1951) are representative of the expanded possibilities of the musical which Kelly was interested in developing. Significantly, during this period, Kelly's media image becomes increasingly defined by his role as technician. His friendship and work with Stanley Donen (from *Cover Girl* on) is often cited in fan magazines, as is his activity as a member of a United States Navy photo-

graphic unit, but his roles as romantic lover are barely investigated in the press. Typical is an article in *Photoplay* entitled "Keeping Up With Kelly" (January, 1945) by Maxine Arnold which centres on Kelly as dancer and patriot:

Come six o'clock every evening, Gene pulled off his dancing slippers, parked them inside the studio lot, rolled up his sleeves and took over his duties as just another citizen . . . You'll always find Gene, whether it be politics or anything else, out slugging for the underdog, the little guy . . . He'll take nothing less than perfection in his dancing and works constantly at dreaming up dance routines that on paper look like combined military operations . . .

Only one paragraph in the entire article considers Kelly's status as a heartthrob. Possibly this is because attention to the war effort was of primary importance but also, I think, because Kelly's romantic lovers are troublesome in their overtly selfish, morose and insular characteristics. The reference to Kelly's "slugging for the underdog" is ironic, in this sense, as the underdog in most of his films in his own character (Danny in *Cover Girl*, Joe Brady in *Anchors Aweigh*, Gabey in *On The Town*, O'Brien in *Take Me Out To The Ball Game* and Jerry Mulligan in *An American In Paris*).

Mulligan is an extreme case and I think it is worthwhile to consider the effect this has on Kelly's image as a romantic lover. In particular, Kelly's Mulligan is an individual who is selfishly inclined not to confidence but hyper-anxiety and hysteria. His relations with women are strictly unilateral (he doesn't love Nina Foch/Milo but he will *use* her; he loves Leslie Caron/Lise and will find life meaningless if he can't *have* her).¹⁰ His habit of proscribing contexts for his relationships results in a situation whereby his only hope for reclamation is a *deus ex machina*, which is provided in the spectacle. The spectacle is the logical extension of the overpowering sense of hysteria which has been the motivation for Mulligan's actions. In fact, director Vincente Minnelli's orchestration of this hysteria tends to point more to the problems of Mulligan's notions of masculinity than to the solution which romantic love can provide. The focus seems to be the inherent entropy of Mulligan's selfish authoritarianism (abandoned, dressed as the fool, in a world which is defined by black and white forms — and perceptions?) and I think, to this extent, it is quite interesting to perceive thematic parallels between Minnelli's musicals and melodramas. The connotations of this type of character, though, as a romantic lover (defined by selfishness, anxiety and insecurity) are bothersome and may provide some explanation for the extensive discussion and promotion of Kelly's technical expertise, patriotism, liberalism and status as family man — anything that would avoid consideration of his image as romantic lover.

An interesting, if obvious, aspect of the tendency to avoid Kelly as lover is the linking of Kelly's film roles to his real-life activities. "Where's Kelly?" (*Photoplay*, November 1945), an article by Harriet Eaton, uses Kelly's role in *Anchors Aweigh* as a jumping-off point in a discussion of Kelly's life in the uniform of the United States Navy. Ironically, the trajectory of the article is essentially intended to place Kelly in a domestic setting (both he and Betsy are trying to establish themselves near his Washington, D.C. base) and includes insights into how Kelly feels about his life at this point, issues which had been assumed in earlier articles. One section, in particular, is worth quoting here as it seemingly attempts to mediate between the image of Kelly as a husband and a father and that of Kelly as romantic lover (a notion which, as discussed in Wood's earlier-cited article, emphasizes one 'perfect' love for everyone and avoidance of the institution of marriage):

To this day his advice to single friends is, "Never marry until you can't stand living without some one person. Then you're sunk and you might as well give in!"

In the context of the fan magazine, the fact that the last sentence undermines what has come before is entirely acceptable, as it reiterates that this is *just* a fan magazine interview as well as portraying Kelly as a guy who appreciates a good joke (just as a sailor would). Another article, "Traveling Man" (*Photoplay*, August 1952) by Jeanne Sakol, recounts Kelly's experiences in Europe, denies the truth in rumours of friction in the marriage and promotes the image of Kelly as amiable, energetic and respected:

... Gene — as typically American as his native Pittsburgh — brought to Europe a spirit of friendliness and camaraderie that surrounded his sets.

Clearly, these two articles attempt to define and bracket Kelly's image (1945-52) as a perceived established star, happily-married family man, active patriot and inventive musical talent. But, by asking essentially the same question (Where is Kelly?) both articles admit that the Kelly image is not interesting, evasive or both. Desperately, the article which situates Kelly as an American in Europe (which has linkage to his move to Europe in 1952 to take advantage of new tax laws, his role as Jerry Mulligan, his 'discovery' of Leslie Caron and, of course, the films which he made in Europe during his stay there: Hirschhorn, pp. 223-4) attempts to reclaim Kelly's image by listing his supposedly endearing qualities. The lack of consistent consideration of Kelly as a romantic lover (explanations of which can only be speculative but may have included attitudes held by publicists and press towards Astaire's singular position in that role as well as the fact that the role-type was becoming less popular in the postwar period) and his own predilection for working 'behind' the camera during this period resulted in the image attaining a sort of ossification. Something that is of interest, though, is that the increased association Kelly had with Europe, and especially France, not only made him a popular American star there but also loaded his image with a pretension to a certain amount of European 'artiness,' thoroughly substantiated by a film like *Invitation To The Dance* (made in 1952, released in 1956) which was made in Britain with an international cast and consisted of three ballet sequences in a non-narrative form. Not surprisingly, the overall tendency in *Invitation To The Dance* is to portray Kelly as a doomed lover, forever fated to fail in love — the result being the most maudlin of melodramatic scenarios (one of which is an horrendous adaption of *La Ronde*). Also notable, to the extent that it suggests what was deemed approachable material by the fan magazines, is consideration that, during this period, Kelly's involvement with HUAC (he was a member of the Committee for the First Amendment) is barely mentioned — earlier reference to "the little guy" being a typically guarded allusion.

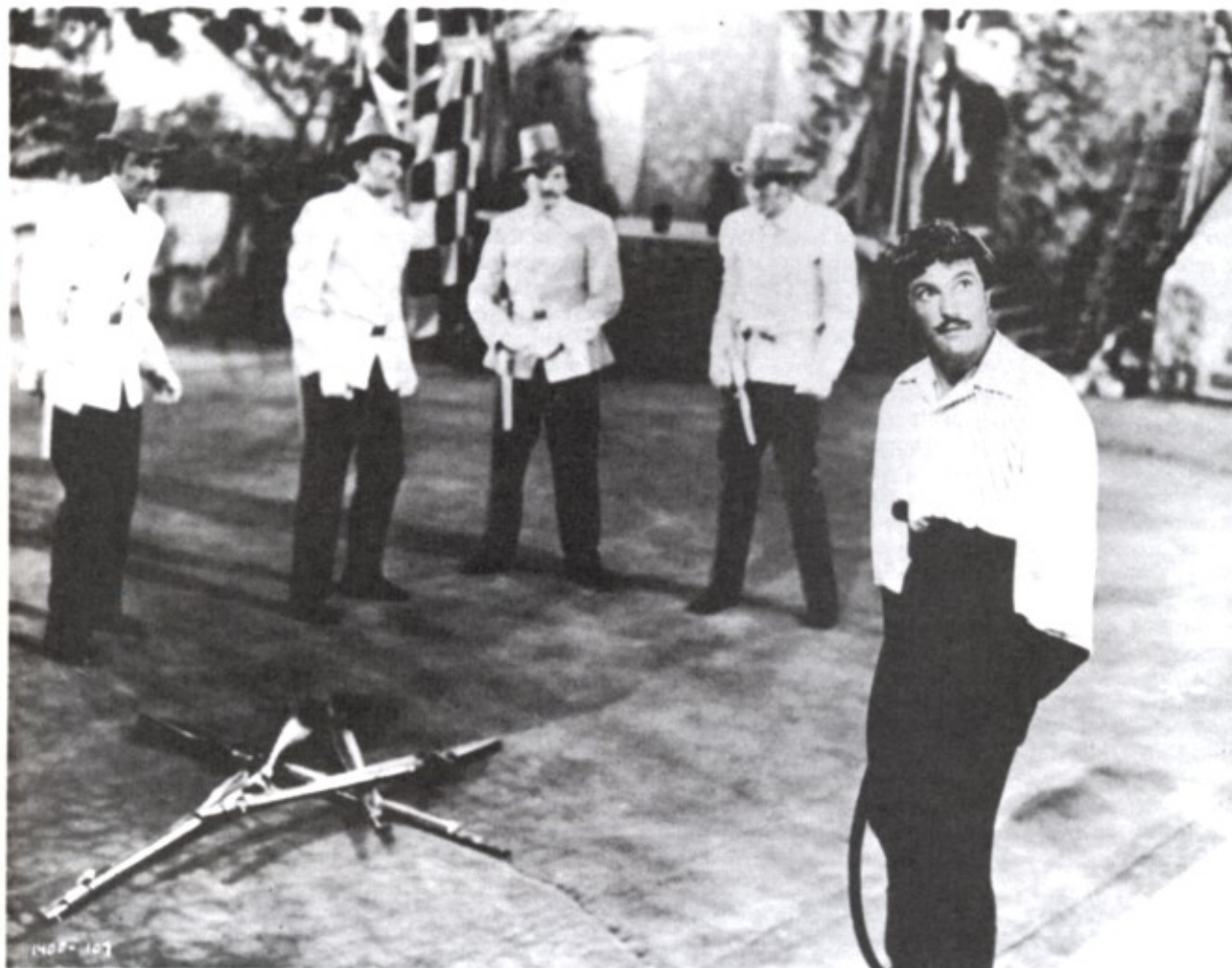
Kelly's image as a romantic lover is difficult because of the ease with which he invokes a masculinity which demands recognition of the male as uncompromised, inflexible and guided by an unquestionable code of ethics — in his view, superior to the female. This image, as I have suggested, is partially the result of spill-over from earlier films, but it develops so consistently in Kelly's work that the effect cannot be blamed entirely on residue. The outcome is that, unlike Astaire-Rogers films where credibility of the romantic love/spectacle symbiosis was tenable because of an egalitarianism between the lovers, the Kelly films depend upon the spectacle as the *deus ex machina* whereby the utterly impossi-

ble is realized. Such a perspective is mirrored in the 'extraordinariness' of the spectacle in films such as *Anchors Aweigh*, *On The Town*, *An American In Paris* and *Brigadoon*. The irony of the 'happy ending' is that given the degree to which Kelly has hysterically backed himself into a corner, in effect establishing himself as in opposition to the woman he wants, the restoration of the romantic couple can only be realized as the most extreme fabrication.

Although it may be a bit of a jump, it is interesting to consider Robert DeNiro's portrayal of Jimmy Doyle in Scorsese's *New York, New York* as a re-presentation of the Kelly image as an aggressive and hysterical romantic lover.¹¹ Specifically, both characters determine requisites for their affairs and are inflexible in their maintenance (consider the similarities between Jimmy's persistence in meeting Liza Minnelli/Francine at the club with that of Gabey's in *On The Town* or, more strikingly, Mulligan's in *An American In Paris*). The ensuing difficulties in these relationships result in hysterical reactions which can be resolved only through termination of the anxiety: for Jimmy and Francine this means consummating the union by means of the spectacle. No matter what stylistic tradition is operating, 'realism' or 'fantasy,' the narrative result is stasis. Sirk, in his melodramas has made us all aware of this. The distasteful 'trite-ness' of musicals, as opposed to the 'progressive-ness' which can be perceived in *New York, New York* and the Sirk melodramas, hangs on their general lack of interest in presenting contentious issues like male domination, male hysteria or patriarchal entropy in favour of celebrating the romantic heterosexual couple — usually at the expense of the female lover's integrity. Some musicals, like the Astaire-Rogers cycle and *The Pirate*, assume an appreciably more rigorous critique of the romantic love theme and can be seen as progressive. This sense of appraisal is central to my consideration of Kelly's image as liberator.

KELLY AS LIBERATOR, HYSTERIC AND ICON

If the larger part of Kelly's work during the late '40s determined his image as a misogynistic, self-centred romantic lover whose dance performances were essentially processes of captivity (as opposed to liberation), it was due largely to the fact that the films' narratives encouraged the perception that male determination and hysteria in the face of difficulties were necessary for the justification of the romantic couple. Domination by the male partner, in these films, is a given: happiness for the audience was equated with the happiness of the male lover. *The Pirate* (1948) effectively dismisses the presumptions of male domination and proceeds to celebrate issues of play, romance, fantasy, sexual and social role appraisal and liberation in a manner which provides Kelly with what I feel is his most progressive image as a musical film star. The fact that Kelly could be used to this end further suggests the lack of imagination evident in creating his previous (and, as it turned out, his subsequent) image as a romantic lover. It is not that Serafin is a mature development of Kelly's romantic lovers for, in fact, I would suggest that Serafin, much to his credit, is more infantile than any of them is certainly more aware of his insecurities. The fact that he is cognizant of his maleness, and the problems inherent in that (specifically the parallel which he perceives, and manipulates, in the masculine image of Macoco) is the key to his development beyond the limitations of the typical romantic lover. Even Astaire's characters, who repeatedly avoid machismo as a tactic to win a lover, seem



Kelly as pirate-parody Serafin in *The Pirate*.

constrained and linear when considered in the context of Kelly's Serafin.

It is interesting to note that *Easter Parade*, made in the same year as *The Pirate* and originally slated as a Garland-Kelly-Minnelli project, attempts a similar 'liberation' theme. But whereas Kelly/Serafin 'plays' throughout his film, Astaire's character resorts to 'play' only after realizing his masculinized, Svengali approach will not achieve the success he wants. This success is defined as substantiating his ability as father-figure and master which entails the discrediting of Ann Miller's character and the 'parading' of Judy Garland's. Serafin's success, on the other hand, is dependent upon an environment of challenge and assertion — not domination. The trial sequence, for instance, depends upon Manuela and Serafin being capable game players. The closing sequence, the "Be A Clown" number, substantiates this perception in that 1) both Serafin and Manuela have equally active roles in the show, 2) she has realized her fantasy of denying social and sexual stereotypes and 3) the initiative of play, so central to both characters' liberation, is installed as a permanent feature of their romance and their lives. The fact that *The Pirate* was a box-office failure, and *Easter Parade* was not, leads to speculation that, given the social climate of the time, play was 'out' and father figures were 'in.'

This, of course, reflects a larger social context and specifically the attempts to return women to their homes after the

war and the intensification of housewife- and family-identified consumerism. I think *Easter Parade* (intended to recoup the losses of *The Pirate*) could have been a revealing extension of that film's thematic thrust had Kelly not broken his ankle (which forced Astaire out of retirement and into the film) and Minnelli been retained as director (MGM felt his presence was upsetting Garland and thus substituted Charles Walters). As it stands, the film is a counterpoint to *The Pirate* and is valuable in the sense that it suggests the degree to which the earlier film is a progressive alternative — for Kelly specifically but also the musical genre as a whole — to traditional portrayals of romantic love. In fact, *Singin' In The Rain* (1952) is significant to Kelly's image to the degree that it takes up exactly this type of alternative vision of romantic love despite the fact that its treatment becomes twisted and largely regressive; certainly when compared to *The Pirate*. The problem is that, while the film suggests a progressive vision, it really is pulling the same strings which make *Easter Parade* so objectionable. That is, Debbie Reynolds/Kathy Selden's 'awakening' hinges on the recognition of Kelly/Don Lockwood as an 'old hand' who knows what is good for her. Despite Lockwood's self-effacement (especially in the scenes which recount his rise to fame), the narrative establishes him as the conventional romantic lover by 1) undermining Selden's high art in favour of his movies and 2) indicating that women like Jean Hagen/Linda Lamont must be pun-

ished for their assertiveness and longings for domination (qualities which, embodied in the man, are allowed to pass without criticism). Simply put, *Singin' In The Rain* is duplicitous and crass and although it associates itself with what is positive in *The Pirate* it is too severely compromised to be perceived as developing Kelly's image as a 'liberator.'

The remainder of Kelly's career is essentially formulated along the lines of fulfilling his image as a dancer. In films like *Let's Make Love* (1960) and *What A Way To Go* (1964) Kelly is specifically featured as an icon — he is not just a dancer, he is *the* dancer. The ultimate result is the *That's Entertainment* packages of the '70s and his role in *Xanadu* (1980).¹³ A film role which is noteworthy during this period is that of Noel Airman in *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958). Specifically, in the sense that it addresses issues of masculine domination, hysteria and repression it foregrounds conflicts which have been central to Kelly's image throughout his career. Given that this role was Kelly's first outside a long-term contract (his last obligation to MGM was *Les Girls*) and one which he favourably anticipated, involvement in *Marjorie Morningstar* can be perceived very much as a personal-choice venture for Kelly. At the same time it can be seen as a problematic choice given that the demise of the studio system left minimal recourse if the project excessively stigmatised Kelly as an unpopular commodity.

In *Marjorie Morningstar* self-doubt and hysteria (traits which also inform Kelly's romantic lover image) are central to the character of Noel Airman who, given that he cannot enforce control over Natalie Wood/Marjorie, assumes the self-righteous position of the rejected lover. His anxiety about the relationship with Marjorie affects his ability to create his art which, in turn, results in his professional failure (there are parallels, here, with Jimmy Doyle in *New York,*

New York). His hysteric reaction to this failure to control his professional and personal relations (essentially portrayed as castration) is ultimate rejection and return to security — he retreats to the children's summer camp as the musical director. The association with children is significant in that Kelly as a musical star often performed with children and *Marjorie Morningstar's* perversion of this relationship (i.e. Kelly only comfortable with children) suggests that the Kelly image as romantic lover is unable to perform in an adult world, and can only realize itself in the role of a father-figure.

Tangentially, Kelly's work with stars like Wood, Reynolds and Caron develops this tendency into themes of male domination of young women, issues of father-daughter relationships and the exoticism of taboo love affairs. Specifically, if the musical number is perceived as a metaphor for sexual activity then these relationships are curiously overt in suggesting an image of Kelly as a father-like lover.¹⁴ But, given the impossibility (in Hollywood production) of 'investigating' such love affairs these films tend to negativize the Kelly character or re-orient themselves as celebration of the patriarch (as in *American In Paris*, *Brigadoon*, *Les Girls*). In fact, the move to stabilize Kelly as patriarch is not surprising in that throughout the '50s several aging male stars were involved in a similar project: Tracy in the films with Hepburn and Minnelli's *Father Of The Bride* and *Father's Little Dividend* and Cukor's *Edward, My Son*; Astaire as a sugar-daddy in musicals with Cyd Charisse, Audrey Hepburn and Caron; Cary Grant in films like *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House* and *Houseboat* or with Caron and children in *Father Goose*. Not since the '30s had father-figures been so overtly topical in popular cinema and this could suggest that the tendency was a response to faltering social mechanisms which could no longer suppress the contradictions and



Kelly as Icon: Dancer and Lover in *Les Girls*.

hypocrisy of patriarchal oppression as exposed by the post-war reconstruction.

Finally, it is important to note that throughout his career Gene Kelly (like most of Hollywood) was actively homophobic. The source of his anxiety, of course, was that he was labelled a "sissy" for his interest in dance and this clearly influenced his attempt to masculinize dancing in the musical. Ultimately, I would suggest that it centrally figured in his interest in putting together the television production *Dancing: A Man's Game* for the Omnibus series in 1958 which is at once homophobic and sexist — hardly unrelated attitudes. His insecurity regarding this matter (there are numerous references to this in Hirschhorn's biography) manifested itself in an hysterical reaction paralleled by those of some of his on-screen characterizations. *Take Me Out To The Ball Game* is transparent in this respect in that "Yes, Indeedy" (a song recounting Kelly's and Sinatra's unrequited loves and the violent resolutions required), the repudiation of Jules Munshin's 'sissy' character and Kelly's ode to paternalism and tradition, "The Hat My Father Wore On St. Patrick's Day" (which he sings in order to lift his spirits after his love-object has spurned him) provide a schematic which is exclusively male-oriented and vehemently hetero-masculinized. Although I am not going to pursue this point further I think the suggestion is clear that Kelly's image is generally symptomatic of the entropic project which Western concepts of masculinity and domination establish and promote. The fact that Kelly, as a director in particular, failed to take issue with these concepts indicates his status as victim but, more importantly, as complicit purveyor of patriarchal ideology. In this sense, the early publicity which claimed he was like "one in a million" guys and "Joe Average" is right on the money. □

Notes

1. I use the term 'directed' so as to embrace all those forces which led to women's exclusion from men's jobs, so called, during the post-war period in America: legislation, union and management collusion, management hiring policies, the ideology of domesticity (all of which are thoroughly investigated by Ruth Milkman in her recent *Gender At Work*, University of Illinois, 1987).
2. The integrated musical attempts to motivate the 'numbers' from within the narrative parameters. Minnelli, for instance, states: "I wasn't impressed by Busby Berkley's spectacular effects . . . Like most musicals of the period, his were crudely made 'backstage' stories. The songs weren't integral to the plot . . . I didn't object to the fantasy per se. But fantasy should have its physical limits too, with a canvas of pre-established dimensions," from his *I Remember It Well*, pp. 113-4.
3. Robin Wood, "Never never change, always gonna dance," *Film Comment*, Sept/Oct 1979, pp. 28-31; also Dennis Giles, "Show-making" and Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia" *Movie* no. 24, Spring 1977, pp. 14-25 and pp. 2-13 open up discussion of the 'eternal' and 'utopian' designations in musicals. As Dyer states, "It (entertainment) presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised." (My italics) Thus romantic love leads to spectacle; cannot effect change; enshrines stasis at the pleasure point/spectacle.
4. Neither Richard Dyer nor Andrew Britton consider this feature in their books on stars (*Stars and Katharine Hepburn, The Thirties And After*) clearly because this phenomenon is relatively recent and not an issue in their studies. Nonetheless, it increasingly deserves attention with stars like Kelly, Eastwood, Streisand, Beatty, Jessica Lange and others who have become involved in projects which they produce and/or direct and star in.
5. Kelly's early history:
— In the early '30s, Kelly helps establish a dancing school with his mother (and brothers and sisters) in Johnstown, Penn.,

— During the '30s, Kelly teaches, performs and helps rehearse out-of-town Broadway shows in Pittsburgh.

— 1937, Kelly makes first trip to Broadway as potential choreographer and, when that fails, returns home.

— 1938, Kelly decides to pursue a career in New York where he lives and works until the role as Joey attracts contract offers from Hollywood.

6. Jeanine Basinger, in her biography of Kelly, recounts a story of Kelly's sister complaining that children in her neighbourhood taunted her for having a draft-dodging brother. (p. 29)
7. Freud, Penguin Freud Library vol. 7, ed. Angela Richards, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 1977, pp. 227 & 243
8. Robin Wood has indicated to me that Kelly was, in fact, considered for a role in *Saboteur* and given his image at the time such a proposition is clearly conceivable. Also, one can pursue the Stewart-Kelly analogy further if Hitchcock's work with Stewart is compared with that of Minnelli's with Kelly in which male hysteria is continually foregrounded.
9. David O. Selznick originally had Kelly's contract and, with no intention of making musicals and finding it hard to use Kelly as a dramatic actor, eventually sold it to MGM in 1942 after *For Me And My Gal* — the only musical, until *Cover Girl* in 1944 in which Kelly was starred.
10. The cruelest of these scenarios occurs in *On the Town* wherein levity is brought to Kelly/Gabey's situation at the expense of Alice Pearce/Lucy Shmeeler who is portrayed as wholly unattractive because she is not physically attractive (of course, she's been 'made-up' as unattractive).
11. DeNiro's performance has been studied profusely but the most applicable work for my discussion is that by Susan Morrison, "Sirk, Scorsese, Hysteria: A Double(d) Reading," *CineAction!* 6, Summer/Fall '86 and an article which directly addresses the similarity of Kelly's and DeNiro's lover-images by Richard Lippe, "New York, New York And The Hollywood Musical," *Movie* 31/32, Winter 1986.
12. The term 'liberator' is extremely problematic in its immediate sexism and orientation to notions of the 'great man.' What I am attempting to get at here, though, is the fact that Kelly, at his best, was useable as a vehicle towards liberation and in the role of Serafin was contrasted against, on the one hand, other movie pirates like Fairbanks and Flynn who were chivalry personified and, on the other, romantic musical heroines who saved women only to subject them to their Svengali-isms. It is by 'using' him (playing with the conventions) that Manuela can begin to consider the de-construction of her situation.
13. In line with the treatment of Kelly as an icon is an article in *Variety* (October 1, 1980) which reported Francis Coppola's intent to place Kelly in an Arthur Freed-like position at Zoetrope Studios. Coppola's effusive regard for Kelly, in the article, projects an image of Kelly as miracle worker and myth.
14. *The Young Girls of Rochefort* is a fine example (like *An American in Paris*) of a Kelly vehicle which brings together the recurrent motifs of his image: situated in France, he is involved with young women (in spectacle) and he entertains/plays continuously with children.

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"MOONSHINE:"



Love and Enchantment in Annie Hall and Manhattan

by Ed Gallafent

FLUTE: (of *BOTTOM*) If he come not, then the play is marred. It goes not forward. Doth it?

QUINCE: It is not possible. You have not a man in all Athens able to discharge Pyramus but he.

FLUTE: No, he hath simply the best wit of any handicraft man in Athens.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

"Woody's UA deal was unique in the business. Contractually his pictures could be made virtually without approvals if they could be made below a specified budget figure . . . There were no reader's reports, no committees, no creative meetings, no casting approvals (unless informal, from Krim), no dailies, nothing but Woody and his script and his budget and Arthur Krim's blessing."

STEVEN BACH

As Head of East Coast and European Production for United Artists in 1978, Steven Bach was in the position of "Keeping" (the word, and the capitalization, is his) both Woody Allen and Michael Cimino, and in his account of the making of *Heaven's Gate* he poses Allen against Cimino. Allen is the good auteur, "nervous and courteous," "gracious and modest," who functions as a positive to everything that is expressed as negative about Cimino. In production terms, Allen is presented as an artist in control — of his budget, of his purposes, of his development — in comparison to the account of the escalating costs and compromised deals surrounding Cimino's film. At the centre of Bach's book sandwiched between the approval of the making of *Heaven's Gate* and the first indications of problems, is his account of the pre-release screening of *Manhattan*. Bach describes the experience of watching the film as pure, unambiguous pleasure, of finding "some kind of enchantment"; elsewhere he writes about the film's "magic."

In this account Allen and Cimino correspond to two familiar ideas of the artist. One is formulated around ideas of discipline, precision, and economy; it is expressed in the admiration for work perfectly articulated within narrowly defined limits. The other might be familiarly expressed as "the-artist-as-romantic-hero"; it concentrates on breadth of vision, desire to extend or demolish pre-existing convention or limitations. It lays stress on originality, and authentic feeling — and it can include the idea of failure, so that the failure to articulate a work of supposedly massive proportions comes to be taken as a form of proof of the artist's stature.

In terms of directors, this kind of division has operated in the past offering figures like Hitchcock and Ford as disciplined auteurs, and Von Stroheim or Welles as frustrated, extravagant pioneers. In terms of the escalating costs of any kind of production in the Hollywood industry in the late 1970s, it has a further dimension — the tendency to ever greater polarization of views of directors into those who are perceived as being reliable and unthreatening, and those whose commercial failures are felt to reflect moral collapse in the auteur him/herself. These views are not unalterable, and are clearly differently inflected according to whether they are held by studio production executives like Steven Bach, critics like those who derided (or defended) *Heaven's Gate* or *Manhattan*, or the filmmakers themselves. But what needs to be stressed is that the two sides of this division are interdependent — that the extraordinary degree of odium heaped on Cimino for *Heaven's Gate* needs to be set alongside the equally striking degree of affection repeatedly offered towards the figure of Allen. Referring to the release of the shortened version of *Heaven's Gate* Bach writes:

The movie began. It was shorter. Maybe better. No one saw it. They saw, instead of the movie on the screen, the movie they had been told about by forests of newsprint, by cascades of critical condemnation . . .²

When the forests and cascades are adulatory, it is harder to remind yourself that the audience isn't seeing the movie any more. Thus trying to think about Allen involves an attempt to disentangle the films from the image of the auteur as "gentle genius."³

In what follows I am trying to read two of Allen's films. They are chosen because they were both successful with audiences (*Annie Hall* grossed \$19m, *Manhattan* \$17.5m⁴) and have been important in the attempt to define Allen as a seventies auteur, as the frequent use of the term "maturity" in responses to *Manhattan* might suggest.⁵ I wish to consider the films in awareness of the specific moments at which they

were made, and also as connected with strands of comedy extending back into classical Hollywood production. If we consider the artist as having "the right and the duty to give to the public the ideas of the time,"⁶ then the way that a maker of comedies may do this may not just be a matter of showing the time's preoccupations. It may as much be something that relates to genre, to what was previously felt to be the subject of comedy and what it is possible to do with it in the late 1970s. The question of what can be successfully framed at a given moment as the subject of comedy has its place in history, and thus its political importance.

ANNIE HALL

It is a commonplace of commentary on Allen that *Annie Hall* (1977) represents a turning point. This seems to be based on an identification of this film as the moment in which Allen moves into American mainstream filmmaking; two major indicators are the financial success of the film, and its four major Oscars.⁷ But while these externals described one kind of change, the subject matter was widely perceived as unique to the director. It is expressed in the very common insistence on seeing the film as "autobiographical," which is sometimes replaced by the looser "personal." But it can be argued that this kind of categorization (or speculation) obscured the fact that film can be aligned with a number of areas that were dominant in the commercial product of the time.

Perhaps the most obvious of these is the '70s "woman's film." The narrative premise of the attempt to reconstruct the couple in contemporary New York is clearly related to a larger cycle of films which attempt to address issues raised for its audience by a liberal version of feminism.⁸ A common structure here is the narrative built around a figure posited as representative of the "new woman." The action consists of the substitution of a "new" man, for an "old," outmoded model — the audience is helped to distinguish the two types and to identify with the former. Two examples at this time would be *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) and *Coming Home*. Both films were commercial successes, grossing \$12m and \$13.4m respectively. Taking *An Unmarried Woman* as an example, it offers simple indicators around which choice is organised. There is the matter of work; Erica/Jill Clayburgh begins the film married to commerce in the form of Martin/Michael Murphy's Wall Street broker and ends it with art in the shape of Saul/Alan Bates's painter — art which, due to the fact of Saul's being an abstract expressionist, is happily subject to no judgement as to quality. Equally the emotional authentication is provided by bald melodramatic device. There is the strategic use of Bill Conti's score to emphasise moments of intensity, the production of tears (several times) and on one occasion, vomit. When the marriage breaks down, the fact that the man cries and the woman throws up signals to the audience the "seriousness" of the project.

Both *Coming Home* and *An Unmarried Woman* offer their final couples in the same terms, the woman as the object of admiration by the "new" man for her "new" qualities. In the final scene of *An Unmarried Woman*, Saul describes Erica as a "bright, wilful, curious woman . . . an independent woman" and finally "vicious." Erica contradicts "vicious" with "honest," but qualified by four other adjectives, "vicious" signifies only the modern, and the audience leaves the theatre with a happy consciousness of having moved with the times. At no point is the positing of the couple taken as anything but self-evidently good — the idea of the couple as such isn't seen to need to be considered, let alone defended, so long as it is the "right" couple.



Annie Hall

In presenting "contemporary" issues *An Unmarried Woman* and *Coming Home* insist on a central relation to the present moment, respectively the New York of the '70s, and the America of the returning Vietnam veterans. The past hardly exists, except possibly as a repository of values that can now be discarded. While it was necessary to the project of such films to excise history, elsewhere it was not the case, and the second area that is important to understanding *Annie Hall* is the currency of attempts to respond to America's present by various kinds of meditations on its past. Obviously there are narratives set in the past, but more important are the '70s movies which drew on the past of Hollywood itself, whether in the form of quotational musicals like *That's Entertainment* (1974) and *That's Entertainment Part Two* (1976), or remakes like the two which immediately precede *Annie Hall*, *King Kong* and *A Star is Born*, both made in 1976, and both substantial box office successes, each grossing over \$36m.

The advertising of *Annie Hall* subtitled the film "a nervous romance," and used the image of the couple of Annie/Diane Keaton and Alvy/Woody Allen. It could be said that a '70s woman's film of the type outlined above is suggested in its narrative, in that it posits the couple of Annie and Alvy, and offers Alvy as both patronizing (he persuaded Annie to take a college course to educate herself) and paranoid (he is sexually jealous of her relationship to her professors). Annie finally leaves him for a figure who seems neither of these things, but can help her in her career, Tony Lacey/Paul Simon.

There is in fact substantial evidence to suggest that *Annie Hall* has some part of these elements as the result of a deliberate series of decisions at the editing stage. The raw footage was the "surrealistic and abstract adventures of a neurotic Jewish comedian," and in it the couple had a relatively subordinate role. According to the account given by the editor of *Annie Hall*, Ralph Rosenblum, the emphasis given to the couple emerged only at a relatively late stage.⁹

It is instructive to consider how *Annie Hall* in its final form diverges from the outline of a '70s woman's film. Firstly, there is no interest in offering the audience the satisfaction of making for themselves the heroine's choice between the "new" man and the "old." Although Tony Lacey seems possibly free of Alvy's possessiveness, nothing is done to establish the couple of Annie and Tony as better (or worse) than the couple of Annie and Alvy. It is not clear exactly in what terms Annie lives with Tony towards the end of the film, and in its last moments we find that she has left him and moved back to New York — but not moved back to live with Alvy. This reflects a basic difference, between the proposal in the liberal feminist woman's film as I outlined it earlier (that the idea of the couple does not need fundamental defence, only modernization) and the premise of *Annie Hall*, that the couple itself is no longer self-evidently validated, but exists as desire that cannot be denied or commuted or satisfied, metaphorically represented here by Allen's monologue jokes about need and food that frame the film.

This point can be extended. The implied validation for the "good" couple is commonly the prospect of the family. In Allen's work the desire continually to form heterosexual relationships is equally measured against the family, but against the contemplation of a crucial gulf, that between the "lost" families of the past and the impossibility of moving the terms of the couple in the contemporary world to a point where "family" might again be a possibility.

Annie Hall opens with a series of references to this, contemplations of different figures of loss. Alvy's past, his child-

hood home under the rollercoaster, contains within its humour a notation of a lost world (the Coney Island of the 1940s), and the opening sketch of the child Alvy is a joke about the vertigo of contemplating time: Alvy is depressed because he has read that the universe is expanding. In the school scene which follows, the effect of Alvy's classmates announcing their eventual fates, which range from the mundane ("I'm president of the Pinkus Plumbing Company") to the bleak ("I used to be a heroin addict. Now I'm a methadone addict") is to displace the children from their roles as figures of growth and possibility and to present them as helpless products of the passing of time. Allen immediately goes on to distinguish Alvy's fate from theirs. The cut here is to the Dick Cavett show, with Alvy as the guest: where the passage of time has delivered Alvy's schoolmates into private enterprise or the withdrawn world of addiction, Alvy is uniquely a public figure, a performer. A few minutes later we see his discomfort at the fact that he cannot stand outside a New York cinema without being recognized.

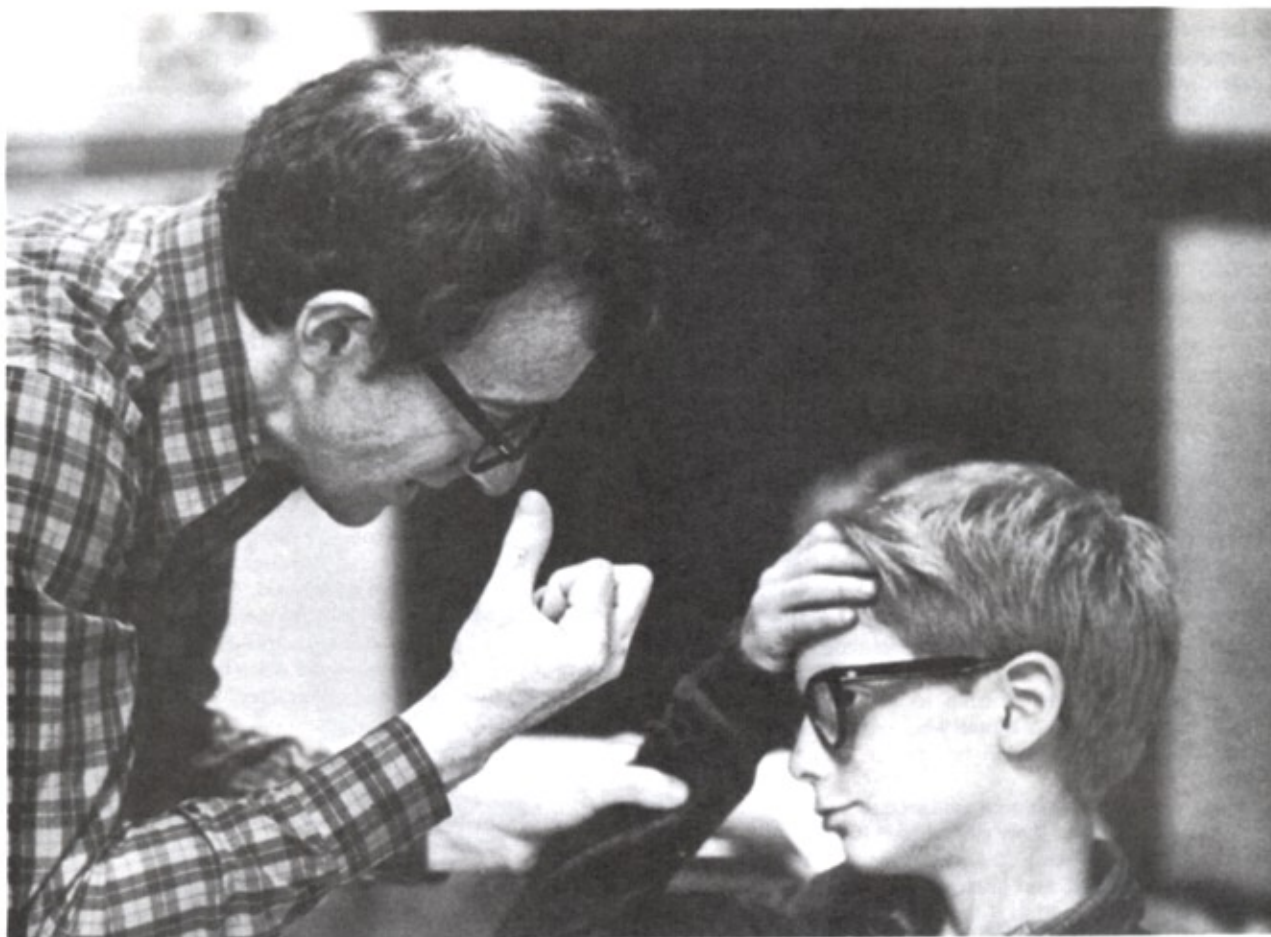
What divides Alvy from the family can thus be characterized in two ways. Expressed through time, it is his isolation from the lost Brooklyn childhood. Expressed through the idea of the public vs. the private world, it is the difficulty in conducting a "private" life in the public sphere. In the opening monologue, the point where Allen is arguably least established for the audience "in character" as Alvy, he produces this unlikely figure:

Unless I'm one of those guys with saliva dribbling out of his mouth who wanders into a cafeteria with a shopping bag screaming about socialism. (sighing) Annie and I broke up and I — I still can't get my mind around that.¹⁰

The man with the shopping bag is familiar as a piece of urban mythology, a figure of personal collapse who in exposing his obsessions becomes a cause of public embarrassment. The parody figure partly acknowledges and partly disavows the paradox inherent in making a movie about the problem of privacy.

That this problem is important to Allen's presentation of the couple is clear in *Annie Hall* where, as in several of his films, the concentration on exteriors or public interiors is insistent. Continually we see Annie and Alvy in public — in cinema foyers, at the Tennis Club, on the street. The second cinema foyer scene takes its humour from the difficulty of a situation in which a private conversation will inevitably be overheard. In the queue, Annie has been referring to "our sexual problem" and Alvy responds by pretending that they are discussing literature: "that was Henry James, right?" Inversely, when private discourse becomes public no acknowledgement can be made of the fact. The pretentious conversation of the man behind them exasperates Alvy: his confuting him by producing the actual figure of Marshall McLuhan from behind a billboard, and the scene's closing line addressed to the audience ("If life were only like this") sufficiently point up the intractability of the social convention.

That this is directly relevant to the possibilities of sexual fulfilment is taken up in the review of Alvy's marital history. Both wives are introduced through public occasions (Allison/Carol Kane at the Adlai Stevenson benefit, Robin/Janet Margolin in a New York party scene) and both sequences move to present jokes about privacy blocked by the inability to shut out the public world, attempts to have sex which fail in the face of Alvy's obsession with the Kennedy assassination, and Robin's awareness of the "New Yorker" party downstairs. This can be reduced, in a motif which recurs in



Annie Hall

Manhattan, simply to the idea of off-stage noise — in a later scene, Robin's sexual pleasure is wrecked by the noises of the city.

The most important form of public occasion in *Annie Hall* is public performance, both Annie's singing and Alvy's appearances as a comic. The film relates the qualities of "performance" and "audience" to the private life of the couple. Annie and Alvy first make love successfully after her disastrous singing date where he alone has played the role of the good audience. Later the scene in which the lovemaking is unhappy — in which Annie's "spirit" leaves the bed when Alvy refuses to let her smoke grass — makes the connection explicit. Trying to explain his disappointment, Alvy reminds Annie that he is a comedian and likens her to a bad audience: "if I get a laugh from a person who's high, it doesn't count." That performance only works in front of the right audience is one point of the two immediately following scenes, a flashback where Alvy, as a young comic trying to sell his material, listens in horror to the crude patter of a comedian/client, and a scene of Alvy onstage successfully working with a college audience.

These scenes also have a further point to make about the role of sexuality in performance. The offering of sexual favours foregrounded in Annie's song (which is "It Had To Be You"), implicitly asserts her sexual confidence. In Alvy's case the performance takes as its subject the anxiety surrounding the status of "comedian" in relation to stereotypes of masculinity. This comic's material insists on his role as the cowed son, with the "emotionally high-strung" mother and the

"strict Freudian" analyst/father. But his work as comedian poses him as a complex figure sexually. It gives him an ambiguous relation to other roles which are themselves also problematic — the intellectual, the performing artist, and the punning on sexual ambiguities observed in the older comic in the agent's office, "mincing around." Furthermore Alvy is also a star, inheritor of the power and charisma that can licence this dismissal of macho stereotypes — he can afford to tell Dick Cavett that "in the event of war I'm a hostage" — and as the narrative several times reminds us, he has the security of the financially well-rewarded. These qualities, although they obviously could be related to the figure of Allen himself, are very specific to the character of Alvy. They are not immutable, and there are important modifications in *Manhattan*, as we shall see.

It is these issues which are apparent in two crucial scenes which seem to be attempts to define what is most attractive about the couple. They are "private" scenes, but they are about the relation of sexual role to behaviour. Their reference to classical Hollywood comedy is hinted in Alvy's opening line: "I told you it was a mistake ever to bring a live thing into this house." As lobsters crawl all over the floor of their beach house, the truth that Annie and Alvy's battle is with repression can be put almost explicitly: "Look! Look, one crawled behind the refrigerator. It'll turn up in our bed at night." The relation to the couple of screwball comedy, and specifically to *Bringing Up Baby* (1938) extends to the punning on the medium — in reply to Annie's "I can't put a live thing in hot water," Alvy's line is "what's he think we're

gonna do, take him to the movies?"¹¹ The comedy's point (here as there) is not exactly the erasure of traditional sex roles, but their inclusion in the scene as a kind of playfulness. This exchange is exemplary:

ANNIE: Come on, Alvy, they're only baby ones, for God's sake.

ALVY: If they're only babies, then you pick 'em up

The brief scene ends with Annie taking photographs. Is the allusion to impermanence, to the difficulty of maintaining this state? In the latter part of the film the scene is reprised twice. Once is direct imitation, when Alvy's new "depressing" date simply hands the sex role back to him ("You're a grown man, you know how to pick up a lobster"). The other, much more important moment, almost the core of Allen's film, occurs after the couple's first break-up, when Annie calls Alvy to her apartment at three o'clock in the morning.

This version of the scene replaces lobsters-in-the-kitchen with spiders-in-the-bathroom. This denotes a movement from something more adult to something more childlike, from the prospect of delicious cuisine to the desire to share a childish fear. The scene charts Alvy's slide from adult to child. At first he is in authority (telling Annie off for not keeping insect repellent), then the querulous lover (he stands in front of Annie's "lobster" photographs, quizzing her about her new boyfriends), and finally the bold child, the spider-killer. As Alvy heads for the bathroom Annie stands in the hallway and stifles a giggle.

He returns triumphant ("I did it! I killed them both"). It is the return to childhood that licenses the next moment, the reconciliation in which Annie can allow herself to cry. We see her in middle distance, sitting on her bed, which is positioned in a corner. The image is strikingly plain; in contrast to the "adult" living room next door, here the walls are bare and the single bed made up with a plain brown cover. The couple sits together in the corner; the sexualized reconciliation, the cut to their lovemaking, is also a cut back to Alvy's apartment.¹²

It is at this point that we see, not the movement towards the confirmation of the new couple and eventual implied marriage, but the exploration of what the limits of the role of the couple are now understood to mean. To Annie's suggestion — "What if we go away this weekend?" — Alvy counters "Why don't we get Rob, (*Annie's smile momentarily fades*) and the three of us'll drive into Brooklyn?" A contemplation of the future is replaced by one of the past, and the exclusivity of the couple gives way to Alvy's part in two different kinds of bond, the lovers, and the buddies with a shared past.

Allen's technique here is to place Annie, Alvy and Rob/Tony Roberts on the stage of scenes where they review Alvy's past in flashback while remaining invisible and inaudible to the other actors. At the centre of the sequence is a moment which Alvy annotates as "The welcome-home party in 1945, for my cousin Herbie." The long-lost atmosphere of such a moment — the end of a war fought and won — must have been felt in clear contrast, in 1977, to America's present, and the point of the scene is the decay of beauty and talent. Two figures picked out of the crowd, their lost pretensions to humour and beauty (Joey Nichols punning on his name and Aunt Tessie's already-departed charms) frozen in flashback. The last part of the scene takes the form of a series of "exchanges" whereby Tessie, nominally addressing a young girl in 1945, answers a series of questions posed by Rob. As Alvy stands between Annie and Rob, Allen gives him a series of gestures (touching his glasses, putting his head on one side,

touching Annie) suggestive of his responses; fascinated and amused, but not at ease in the presence of times past.

The scene which follows ends one strand of *Annie Hall*. It is the last scene, apart from the packing up of Annie's things after the final break-up, where we see the couple alone and in private. It is Annie's birthday. Alvy's presents relate to the passing of sexual excitement and time — they are a set of "erotic" underwear bought as a joke (Alvy's telling gag is "It'll add years to our sex life"), and her "real" present, a wristwatch. The scene ends with an embrace, over which play the introductory notes of the next sequence, Annie's first successful public performance — the song is "Seems Like Old Times."

The performance of the song works in a number of ways. It is part of an a-star-is-born narrative, initiating the movement that will take Annie off to California and into the arms of Tony Lacey/Paul Simon. It is a celebration of the dissolution of the conflict between private and public around which the film has been built, using the convention common in the musical that the song is sung in public but within the narrative addressed to only one listener. The convention is supported by the details of Keaton's performance as she stands at the mike, her play of expression obviously addressed to the offscreen Alvy. The lyrics of the song celebrate an attitude to the couple expressed in the film — the past cannot be retrieved, but it can be celebrated with generosity. At the end of *Annie Hall*, the reprise of the song is played over a montage of scenes of Annie and Alvy's affair.¹³

Finally, the fact that the song is a "classic"¹⁴ offers something more than simple nostalgia. The presence, particularly at this historic moment, of a scene in which a female star performs material which is associated with the past can be related to the mass of "quotational" material in the late Hollywood musical to which I referred earlier, not only the *That's Entertainment* films, but the continuing popular importance of figures such as Judy Garland in the mid-seventies.¹⁵ What is being celebrated here is in part "entertainment" itself; Annie's song both refers to and seems to make momentarily possible a relation to the past that is entirely innocent — in other words, utopian.¹⁶

The ending of *Annie Hall* begins with a gesture of undermining the "happy ending." Allen moves from the final break-up scenes in Los Angeles to a rewrite of Alvy's last moment with Annie (in which the couple do not part) as the end of Alvy's new play, an example of "trying to get things to come out perfect in art." The link with the earlier moments is in Allen's choice of actor and actress to play the roles of Annie and Alvy. Again the connection is between a respectable world and a momentary recapturing of a state of childhood — the two figures are portrayed by much younger actors than Keaton and Allen.

The shift at this point is from direct dramatic presentation to the return to the monologue which opened the film. There is narrative information still to come — that Annie returned to New York, met Alvy again by chance, that they lunched, "kicked around old times" and parted. But these last moments are presented as visual accompaniment to Alvy's voice-over. Visually, the stress is on remoteness. The figures are seen in middle or long shots, or through windows. The last moment is exemplary: Alvy and Annie part in a city street, exchanging a final kiss in long shot, after which Annie, and then Alvy, walk out of shot. The last moments of Alvy's monologue are spoken over the street scene, empty of everything but traffic. Everything, that is, but traffic and song — over the whole sequence is the subdued reprise of Annie singing "Seems Like Old Times," and the effect of the song is

essentially to allow the final moments of the film to celebrate the value of the couple's "old times" rather than mourn a collapse. The shot which immediately precedes Annie and Alvy's final parting is the final moment of the montage sequence, showing the couple on FDR drive, posed against New York, the past and the couple which this ending proposes will be developed in *Manhattan*.

MANHATTAN

This is less a play, in the sense that we call *Rosmersholm* a play, than a musical symphony"

HARLEY GRANVILLE-BARKER ON *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*¹

The opening moments of *Manhattan* present the viewer with a set of effects crucial in terms of their combined force. The appeal of the opening shots of the city and the simultaneous opening notes of *Rhapsody in Blue* operates alongside Allen's voice-over. The effect of this is to counterpoint achieved artistic expression identified with New York and the past (Gershwin) with attempts to find a mode of expression for the contemporary moment. Within this monologue, the strategy is to present the terminology of intellectual critique (New York as a "metaphor for the decay of contemporary culture") and then to abandon it for a popular idiom, but to offer that as parody ("Behind his black-rimmed glasses was the coiled sexual power of a jungle cat . . . New York was his town . . ."). The third element is the collage of

images of New York, ending with the sequence in Elaine's, the opening narrative moment. If the point of the opening is clearly enough to establish these connections, the rest of *Manhattan* tries to contemplate what they might mean. My reading of the film is an attempt to answer this question.

The most decisive shift between *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* can be expressed in terms of the way in which Allen has inflected the character that he plays in each movie. As the common comment on the "autobiographical" nature of *Annie Hall* suggests, the Alvy Singer character reflects the sides of Allen's role as a star which are perceived positively. As a highly successful comic, Alvy is subject to the privileges as well as the pressures of the well-paid and well-known. In *Manhattan* the shift is away from presenting the figure as a "star," towards locating him within a milieu which has less to do with successful showbusiness and performance, and which presents different versions of the figure of the "urban intellectual" and the contexts of consumption and production in which such figures live. The shift can be expressed by considering the movement in the characteristics of the Allen-figure's male friend. In *Annie Hall* Rob is a TV actor, cheerfully philistine, and single with this sexual freedom offered as comedy. In *Manhattan* the comparable figure is Yale/Michael Murphy, "an intellectual teacher critic,"¹⁸ married, whose sexual life is offered as drama.

The relationship between the friend and the Allen-figure also shifts. In *Annie Hall* the shared childhood gives way to underlining differences, most clearly expressed in Rob's move to the West Coast, and the expression of his relation to mas-



Manhattan: Tracy/Mariel Hemingway and Issac/Woody Allen.

culinity as increasingly bizarre. His last moments in the film include the reference to the twin sixteen-year-olds that are his new lovers and the visual gag of the elaborate helmet to keep out "the alpha rays . . . you don't get old."

In contrast *Manhattan* works from first to last around an awareness of the similarities between a number of the figures in its central group. (The exception is Tracy/Mariel Hemingway to whom I will return.) What might be said to characterize them most generally would be a commitment to intellectual work understood as "serious," and various degrees of ability to produce such work and confidence in it. The film continually refers to writing and its value. Ike gives up his writing of "crap for television" so he can start his book on New York. Yale replies to his wife Emily/Anne Byrne's desire for children with a reminder that he has to get his O'Neill book finished. In the film's opening moments we learn that Jill/Meryl Streep, Ike's ex-wife, has left him for another woman and is writing a book about the marriage. And Mary/Diane Keaton, Yale's mistress and later Ike's lover, is a journalist writing pieces on, among others, Borges and Brecht.

Allen's purpose is not to make evaluative distinctions between these projects. The one which might superficially seem most to invite attack or derision would be Jill's book on the marriage, the only completed volume that appears in the film. But the lesbian couple is not made the butt of humour, and the audience is not particularly invited to share Ike's anger about the publication of the book.

The point is that if the group of characters share to a considerable extent the same goals, anxieties and commitments, then the series of sexual relations that the film maps cannot neatly be explained, as I considered earlier, by the replacement of one figure with another in terms of a judgement expressed through what they do. The interest of *Manhattan* lies exactly in its not having the kind of rationale that determinedly suggests that sexual choice is organised in this way. The fact that Mary is attracted to Yale, then to both Yale and Ike, then is living with Ike, and finally returns to Yale is presented in terms of a continual preference for comic devices over the conventions of melodrama. An example would be the final scene between the two men, in which the terms of the confrontation are played out. Ike's anger at the fact of "betrayal" (Mary has been seeing Yale without his knowledge) is set against the fact that the only language that the two men can find to express what has happened is that of the playground — "I liked her first," Ike's morally superior attitude to Yale is modified not only by our awareness of his fallibility from elsewhere in the film, but by the setting. The scene parodies a moment in *Hamlet*; the traditional appeal to the absolute of mortality — the skull — becomes the skeleton, the "educational apparatus" that hangs in this schoolroom, prominently in the frame and finally addressed directly by Ike. The effect is to underline the recasting of these sentiments in comedy: "a fellow of infinite jest" has become "he was one of the beautiful people," and the speaker is no longer a Danish prince.

The reference to Shakespeare here can be extended in ways which help our understanding of the film. We know that Allen invokes Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* overtly in a later comedy.¹⁹ Consider here the relationship between Mary and Ike. It moves from the daylight meeting (where they dislike each other at once) to the night walk through a New York offered as "enchanted." This is achieved both by the use of music (the orchestration of Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me") and the nature of the screen image (the poised composition of the couple in

longshot, on a bench by the 59th Street Bridge); and it is deliberately underlined in the script in the moment where the screen image remains the long shot as Mary and Ike talk about the beauty of the city. The quality of their next meeting is continuous with this. A storm creates another world of enchantment, the sequence in which they take shelter and wander through the dimly-lit Hayden Planetarium. As they stand in front of a huge photograph of Saturn, Allen gives Mary these lines:

Oh, look, there's Saturn. Saturn is the sixth planet from the sun. How many of the satellites of Saturn can you name? There's Mimas — Titan, Dione, Hyperion of course . . .

I take the point of this otherwise unlikely speech to be a playful allusion to the barely suppressed erotic qualities of the moment. The common ground is classical mythology. The reference to Saturn is to a god of fertility in classical myth, and the names of the satellites, drawn from the same source, allude to a world of sexual myths on which Shakespeare also draws in part for the names of the enchanters and enchanted in his play. Later, in the sequence at the Nyack waterfront, there is a moment which suggests the wearing off of an enchantment which neither of the participants quite understands. Ike's line to Mary is "Whose side are you on?" and she replies "What do you mean?" The nominal subject of the conversation is unconscious motivation, Ike's attempt to run over Jill and her lover, but the subtext is arguably Mary's relationship to Yale. Elsewhere Allen makes use of the switch between enchanted darkness and prosaic light. The most stark moment of contrast must be the cut between Ike and Tracy's Central Park carriage ride and Yale and Mary's bitter argument in her apartment.

The point here is not to insist that parallels between Shakespeare's play and *Manhattan* need to be pursued very far, but rather that identifying common elements helps to illuminate the film's strategies. The same is true of another area, itself closely related to Shakespearean comedy, the cycle of classical Hollywood comedies that has been described by Stanley Cavell as "the comedy of remarriage."²⁰ We can see in *Manhattan* the vestiges of a comedy of remarriage, a film which would begin with the couples of Ike/Tracy and Mary/Yale, offer Ike's affair with Mary as a moment of enchantment, a spell laid in the night and dissolved in the daylight, and conclude with Mary returned to Yale, Ike to Tracy. To sketch this not only suggests those elements of the structure that are present, but throws into relief those that are not. Yale's trajectory in the film does not include the finding, loss and final re-finding of Mary, but the presence of Emily inflects this negatively, and Yale's relation to Mary never seems more than a sexual impulse. His attitude to his own impulses is defined for us in the line given as his gloss on the Porsche he buys in the course of the film: "I know it's a meaningless extravagance . . . but I had to have it." We are given no final scene with Yale and Mary; in its place is a moment with Emily and Ike where Yale's attitude is encapsulated in Emily's wry comment on his affairs, that "marriage requires some minor compromises."

We now come to the couple of Ike and Tracy. The difference between the meaning of the two couples depends greatly on the figure of Tracy, and it is necessary to look at her in some detail. I take one central scene here to be a moment which she initiates, the carriage ride in central park. In it she is defined by Ike, and for the audience, as a creature made by God (Ike says that God replies to Job: "I do a lot of terrible things, but I can also make one of these"). This underlines



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Tracy's physical beauty (in contrast Ike describes Mary as "sort of pretty"). But more than this it stresses Tracy's status as a sign, as the embodiment of a promise, as a force which can be balanced against intuitions of horror and terror. To define her as made by God is to move her out of the role of the social and towards the symbolic.

As well as these points, there is the matter of Tracy's age. Almost the first thing that Allen tells us in *Manhattan* is that Tracy is 17. Taken together with the clear hints that her family is rich, a familiar American archetype begins to emerge, which canvasses much more than merely "innocence" — the figure of the American Princess, the heroine who, in "confronting her destiny," in Henry James's words, embodies both the promise and the possible defeat of American civilization.²¹ Such a figure and its importance to both comedy and melodrama in classical Hollywood, could be discussed at length.²² Its importance for *Manhattan* can be taken from an examination of this moment:

TRACY: So what happens to us?

IKE: Well, you know, we'll always have Paris. I'm kidding . . . You . . . What kind of question is that? You know you can't think of that now.

TRACY: You won't take me seriously, just because I'm seventeen.

IKE: Yeah, exactly, because you're seventeen. I mean, look at it, I mean, it's ridiculous. When you're seventeen now . . . When you're thirty six, I'll be . . . um . . .

TRACY: Sixty-three.

IKE: Sixty-three, right. Thank you. You know, it's absurd. You'll be at the height of your sexual powers. Of course, I will too, probably, but . . . you know, I'm a late starter.

Ike's reference to *Casablanca* ("we'll always have Paris") provides a starting point here. The connection made is between this situation and a famous case where the separation of the couple is legitimated by an external factor. In *Casablanca* it is the audience's agreement with Rick/Humphrey Bogart as to the preeminent importance of the political cause represented by the Paul Henreid character. Here it is a social taboo, the idea that the age gap renders any permanent linking of the lives of Ike and Tracy improper.²³ Ike shares this view consciously and unconsciously rejects it. No moment in the film registers this more delicately than the quality of Mariel Hemingway's performance, her expression as she supplies the number that Ike's mathematical skills seem suggestively unable to provide. His final speech is a response to the importance of her expression: rather than two shots, the whole sequence is shot with the camera directly on the face of the speaker, and the back of the head of the listener in the frame, which seems to emphasize the intensity with which these two look at each other's faces. I take her expression to comprehend both Ike's desire to believe that the couple is perfectable and need not be corrupted, and the fear that their staying together will inevitably tend towards such corruption. It is a fear which haunts the film from its opening narrative moment, caught cinematically in the visual resemblance between Emily and Tracy, which extends down

to the detail of their identically dressed hair. In her final scene with Ike, we can read Emily as a Tracy who has learned that the world is a matter of "compromises."

Allen ends the film with the blocked re-uniting of the couple, in the scene in which Ike goes to Tracy to find that she is about to leave for London. At first there seems to be a possible resolution; we have this exchange:

IKE: Do you still love me or has that worn off or what?

TRACY: Jesus, you pop up. You don't call me and then you suddenly appear . . .

It would be easy enough to complete this speech (I mean of course the spirit of it) in the terms of Hawksian comedy. The dialogue between the two has reached the edge of the moment where the woman's denunciation of the man turns into the declaration of love — Feathers/Angie Dickinson's speech to Chance/John Wayne at the end of *Rio Bravo* will serve as one example.

Allen does not do this. He ends not with an embrace but a moment of contemplation. Tracy's conviction that "six months isn't so long," that experience does not necessarily mean corruption, expressed literally at the point of her departure for Europe, not only underlines her inheritance of meaning as the figure of the American Princess. It is a reminder that the quality of promise embodied in this figure is renewable, but that the conditions of comedy can only take us to the point where the resolution of the problem it implies must be postponed — to the edge, so to speak, of what would have to become a Jamesian narrative. Here the problem is called, simply, "experience." Ike's reply to Tracy's "Don't you want me to have that experience?" exemplifies the blockage: "Yeah, of course, I do, but you know, but you could . . . you know, you . . . I mean, I just don't want that thing about you that I like to change." As this speech ends, the reprise of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* begins, *pianissimo*, on the soundtrack. It plays over the couple's last words, over Ike's smile in contemplation of Tracy's faith which is the last moment of the narrative, and into the shots of the Manhattan skyline with which the film ends. The music (written in 1923) obviously represents a quotation of a past, of the confidence of the New York of the '20s. Its effect here is to associate the final images with that confidence; the quotation is a reinscription, and Manhattan again becomes the city of which Scott Fitzgerald wrote in 1926:

The city seen from the Queensboro Bridge is always the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world.²⁴

So the ending registers both an insistence and a limitation. An insistence on the political importance of the personal — that the fate of the American Princess is bound up with the fate of Manhattan and by implication American civilization.²⁵ And the limitation — that the difficulty in constructing any possible resolution within the terms of the society Allen describes throws him necessarily back on the past for any kind of intuition that a solution might be at all possible.

FOOTNOTES

1. Steven Bach, *Final Cut: Dreams and Disaster in the making of 'Heaven's Gate'* London, Cape, 1985, p. 109.
2. Bach, op. cit., p. 398.

3. The words used in the titling of the July 1986 Allen retrospective at the National Film Theatre, London.
4. All the figures quoted are domestic rentals as listed by *Variety*, rather than boxoffice grosses.
5. The *New York Times Magazine* reviewed *Manhattan* under the title 'The Maturing of Woody Allen.' Richard Schickel's piece for *Time* was called 'Woody Allen comes of Age.'
6. The words are Brecht's, giving testimony to the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947. See Eric Bentley, ed. *Thirty Years of Treason* London, Thames & Hudson, 1972, p. 211.
7. The production and direction Oscars, best actress and best original screenplay. Allen was nominated as best actor, but lost the award to Richard Dreyfuss in *The Goodbye Girl*.
8. There has been a great deal of writing on this area. Particularly relevant here are Charlotte Brunsdon, 'A Subject for the Seventies,' *Screen*, Vol. 23, nos. 3/4, a detailed discussion of *An Unmarried Woman* and its reception. See also Christine Geraghty, 'Three Women's Films' and Andrew Britton's consideration of *Coming Home* in his 'Sideshow: Hollywood in Vietnam': both articles are in *Movie* 27/28.
9. Ralph Rosenblum and Robert Karen *When the Shooting Stops*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1979, p. 275 and Chapter 19, *passim*.
10. The screenplays of *Annie Hall*, *Interiors*, *Manhattan* and *Stardust Memories* are published in England under the title *Four Films of Woody Allen* London, Faber, 1983. The italicised directions do not seem to be Allen's but the publisher's — I have avoided them where they seem problematic.
11. I am thinking, of course, of the line in the jail sequence of *Bringing Up Baby*: "She's making all this up out of old motion pictures."
12. Some analogous moments are explored at some length in Stanley Cavell's discussion of *The Lady Eve* in his *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard UP, 1981.
13. Rosenblum, op. cit., makes it clear that these were very last minute changes in the editing of the film.
14. An obscure classic, music by Carmen Lombardo and lyrics by John Jacob Loeb. I have not been able to establish an exact date for the song, but the authors seem to have been most active in the 1950s.
15. See Jane Feuer *The Hollywood Musical* London, Macmillan, 1982, p. 120 and Chap. 5 *passim*.
16. The term is discussed fully in this context in Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and Utopia,' *Movie* no. 24.
17. Harley Granville Barker *The Exemplary Theatre* 1922, p. 211.
18. A gloss in the Faber screenplay; these are not Allen's words but they seem uncontentious.
19. *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982), which makes extensive use of the incidental music composed for the play by Mendelssohn in 1843.
20. Cavell, op. cit. See note 12.
21. There are other hints. As Ernest Hemingway's granddaughter, Mariel Hemingway is part of an American dynasty — and is the fact that the character's name refers us to the Tracy Lord of *The Philadelphia Story* a random chance?
22. See Britton Katharine Hepburn: *The Thirties and After* Newcastle, Tyne-side Cinema, 1984, pp. 3-5 and *passim*.
23. A taboo that can be resolved in Hawksian comedy, in *To Have and Have Not* or *Rio Bravo*.
24. F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1973, pp. 74-75.
25. Ike's final speech to Yale, where the link between Yale's treatment of his friends and "naming names" is made, is the nearest the film comes to spelling this out.

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Sunrise:



a reappraisal

The Wife (Janet Gaynor) abandoned by The Husband for his nocturnal tryst.

background, the ground covered in fog. The camera tracks with him at first, then allows him to move away as he circumvents the trees; he then turns and moves forward into close-up (the moon has disappeared from the image). As he walks towards the camera it turns from him and tracks towards some bushes; we assume the shot has become subjective, that we are now occupying the man's position. We pass through the bushes and find the City Woman waiting, the moon to her right. But instead of looking into camera she looks off left, expectantly, and begins to adjust her make-up. The rest of the shot is static, the man eventually re-entering the frame from the left. According to Lotte Eisner, Murnau had two artificial moons constructed for this one shot. It takes great concentration to work out consciously that the second moon is in a subtly wrong position, but the subliminal effect may be felt to contribute to the unease and disorientation the shot induces. Far from using the continuous take and moving camera to preserve a strict sense of spatial reality, Murnau is here concerned directly to communicate a state of mind: we lose all sense of direction, all sense of orientation in relation to the protagonist and the décor, and the shot (supported by the connotations of marshes and fog) becomes a metaphorical expression of the man's moral and emotional confusion.

As for editing, I have argued elsewhere (in 'The American Nightmare') that the essential meaning of *Nosferatu* is crucially dependent upon montage (the intercutting of the parallel journeys of Nosferatu and Jonathan both with each other and with shots of Nina ambiguously awaiting the arrival of her 'husband'). The role of editing never achieves quite that level of dominance in *Sunrise* (the level where it becomes indispensable to the film's symbolic structure), but there are certainly sequences where its part might be claimed to be 'decisive' to the effect achieved. Take, for example, the scene of the couple's departure for their trip to the city (in the course of which the husband intends to drown his wife), and the use Murnau makes of the dog. An elaborate buildup establishes the dog as (a) intimately connected to the wife and (b) the arouser of guilt-feelings in the husband: for the audience, the dog is linked to the notion of the wife's safety. Murnau then establishes a series of obstacles separating dog from woman: the dog is tied to its kennel; the high gate is closed; the husband casts off and rows the boat out into the lake. There then follows a mini-sequence of three shots that abruptly transforms the rhythm of the scene: 1. The dog breaks the rope. 2. The dog leaps over the gate. 3. The dog leaps from the jetty and swims toward the boat. The emotional effect of the scene is created through the pattern of slowly built tension and abrupt release, in which the rhythms of editing are at least as important as action within the frame.

The kind of editing (the kind of effect) employed here has, of course, as little to do with Eisenstein as it has with Expressionism (one could adduce parallel examples from the films of Griffith). Although his emphases are seriously misleading and his theoretical basis often confused and mystificatory, Bazin drew attention to important aspects of film in general and Murnau in particular that previous film theory had offered little possibility of dealing with adequately. The third shot cited above is a case in point. Its effect depends upon Murnau's decision *not* to cut between dog and boat: both are in the frame together, boat in foreground, jetty in background, so that the precise distance between them is a visible reality within the image. Further, Bazin's sense that film is ontologically inimical to Expressionism has some arguable theoretical justification. With certain obvious qualifications, we may assume that the camera records the physical reality in

front of it. It continues to do so whether that reality is an actual location or a painted set. The photographing of Expressionist sets is clearly not a genuine cinematic equivalent for Expressionist painting. The actual equivalents that film offers (focal distortion, special lenses, 'special effects') are very limited and mechanical in relation to the freedom of the painter with his brush, paints and canvas. The reasons why, within mainstream cinema, Expressionism in anything like its pure form has become restricted to occasional subjective, fantasy or dream sequences, may not be *exclusively* ideological. Both Murnau and Lang moved swiftly away from pure Expressionism, while retaining many traces of its influence.

Sunrise, then, can be seen as synthesizing many of the major, though disparate, tendencies of the cinema as developed in western culture, those tendencies deriving ultimately from a tradition that far antedates the invention of film. But it is not simply — or even primarily — in terms of an *aesthetic* synthesis that I wish to consider the film: its usefulness for my purposes lies in its synthesis of ideological assumptions, of cultural myths, that transcend both national and class boundaries. Crucial to this is another aspect of its hybrid nature that I have so far neglected: the relationship within it (not entirely harmonious, but impossible without basic compatibilities) between Germany and Hollywood.

A certain schizophrenia can be detected in Fox's attitude to the project. Originally, Murnau was invited over to bring into the American cinema those stylistic and technical devices with whose development his name was associated (the elaborate trick-work of *Faust*, the mobile camera of *The Last Laugh*), and the project was viewed in terms of cultural prestige. But Fox (whether the man himself or the studio he headed doesn't matter) seems to have decided that European 'culture' required some dilution if it were to be palatable to American audiences. The facts are not clearly documented, but studio pressure is generally regarded as responsible for two modifications of the original concept: the substitution of a happy ending for the tragic-ironic one planned (wherein the husband was to die saving the wife he had planned to murder); the lightening of tone in the central sections of the film through the addition of 'comic relief' (presumably, incidents like the Chaplinesque slipping dress strap). As a result, the film can be seen as an uneasy marriage, not only of German and American influences, but, cutting across this, of 'high' culture and popular culture. One might argue that here, at least, artistic failure directly correlates with sociological interest: the evident strain of integrating the various ideological elements actually foregrounds rather than conceals them.

The alternative endings of *Sunrise* (proposed and actual) appear at first to be diametrically opposite: they imply contradictory metaphysical statements — that 'Fate' *can't* be overcome, and that it can. In fact, they must be seen as representing national inflections of patriarchal capitalist ideology. Both equally reaffirm traditional marriage/family as a supreme and unquestionable value. European national cinemas have always been readier to acknowledge the possibility of tragedy — the notion of irreparable loss — within that value-structure, and in German Expressionist cinema this was greatly compounded by the emphasis on Fate (always adverse and implacable). The insistence on optimism in American culture (the assumption that everyone has the right to the pursuit of happiness hardening into a moral demand that everyone — as long as she/he lives within the value-system — *must* be happy, that it is sinful to be other-

wise, an affront to the American way of life) necessitated the 'happy ending' of the classical Hollywood film, a final ideological strait-jacket that many directors (especially European emigrés) devoted so much energy and ingenuity to circumventing. The *unambiguously* pessimistic ending is almost unknown in classical Hollywood: Lang's *Scarlet Street*, perhaps the most startling exception, is predominantly European in conception (French source, German director), and barely survived the strictures of the Production Code. Directors like Sternberg, Sirk and Ophüls used various strategies of style and emphasis to produce irony: finding the happy ending a prison for the artist, they manage to suggest that it is also a prison for the characters (see, for example, their treatment of absolutely traditional 'family reunion' endings in *Blonde Venus*, *There's Always Tomorrow*, and *The Reckless Moment*). Such strategies produced genuinely subversive texts, in which the ideology is presented critically and ironically (for anyone prepared to view it that way). One must not, however, mistake pessimism for subversion: the proposed tragic ending of *Sunrise* would have left the value-system unscathed, and the actual happy ending carries no hint of irony (though the film is inadvertently eloquent about the cost at which it is purchased).

The ideological overlap that makes possible the yoking together of Germanic and Hollywood elements can be seen most obviously in the characters of the two women, Wife and City Woman. Although they play such prominent roles (even, in certain senses, dominant roles, determining the actions of a largely passive male protagonist), neither has any

real autonomy: both function exclusively in relation to the man, the City Woman being in the film to tempt him, the Wife to save him. It is significant that they never appear together in the same scene: they are not even permitted the closeness of a hostile confrontation. An introductory caption neatly underlines the concept of the marriage-relation: the film is described as a 'Song of the man and his wife.' The wife, at least, is in traditional terms psychologically comprehensible: she is devoted to her husband and to the preservation of the family. On the other hand, the City Woman is on that level totally inexplicable: the film sees no need at any point to make her attraction to the hero psychologically plausible (I am thinking here, not in terms of 'real life,' where anything is possible, but in terms of generic conventions, where the possibilities are rigorously circumscribed).

The two women are to be seen as archetypes rather than characters, and what is fascinating is the way these archetypes cross all boundaries of nationality and high culture/popular culture. Although in most of Murnau's films the figure who threatens the heterosexual couple is male (*Nosferatu*, *Tartuffe*, *Faust*, *City Girl*, *Tabu*), the particular female opposition of *Sunrise* has a long history in Expressionist cinema (e.g. the two Marias of Lang's *Metropolis*) and in European culture generally; it also represents one of the major recurrent structures of the American popular film, appearing in every genre. One can see the opposition in terms of good girl/bad girl, wife/seductress, respectable woman/gun moll, rancher's daughter/saloon entertainer. They all reduce basically to the mother and the whore, and the func-



The trolley: beginning of the return journey.

tion of the wife in *Sunrise* is consistently presented in terms of a mother-figure, culminating in the final 'madonna' image, hair spread out over the pillow like the 'glory' of a religious icon. The film testifies to the 'universality' (within western culture) of the archetypes, while presenting them, through the extreme stylization, in a particularly pure and clarified form: the women of *Sunrise* represent the two fundamental myths of women within patriarchal society, myths that are the product of the *male* needs that society creates.

The film's overall thematic/ideological project — the triumphant affirmation of marriage and family through the elimination of the threat the City Woman embodies — is to a large extent impressively realized: it is difficult not to be moved by its two climactic moments (the symbolic remarriage, the final domestic union). But it is also difficult not to feel that, as a coherent statement, the film is very seriously flawed, its project undermined by a number of demonstrable failures and confusions. Most obvious of these is its structural eccentricity. The major conflict is resolved about a third of the way through. From the scene of the symbolic remarriage, it is difficult to feel that the City Woman poses any real threat to the couple; by the point where Murnau cuts in a shot of her circling an advertisement in a newspaper (for farmers to sell their land and move to the city), we have virtually forgotten her existence. The constraints of symmetry and closure that characterize classical narrative may be felt to demand a 'balancing' return journey, a confrontation with the City Woman, a conclusion in the home (all of which the last part of the film gives us); but *dramatically* the film feels complete from the moment of the exit from the church.

The result of this is that throughout the long central section — and especially the sequences in the amusement park — the viewer loses all clear sense of where the film is heading. The texture noticeably thins: there is little here of the dense poetic imagery that distinguishes the first and last parts. The comic incidents (drunken waiter, drunken pig, slipping dress-strap), while amusing enough in themselves, have only the loosest relevance to the thematic structure (they relate vaguely to the city/country opposition, but conspicuously lack artistic necessity). In fact, the artistic failure here is ideologically very interesting. The film is insistently dedicated to an idealization of marriage, but it can affirm that idealization convincingly only in a series of climactic romantic images. The central section demands that we be shown the marriage in its minute-by-minute operation, and we get what amounts to an admission of defeat. Husband and wife slip instantly into incompatible, ideologically determined, male/female roles (he wants to bowl for the pig, she wants to dance romantically); Murnau seems able to conceive their supposedly perfected union only in terms of triviality. Two strategies are employed to conceal this: 1. Distraction, in the form of the sudden proliferation of extraneous incidents, comic relief, minor characters, etc. . . 2. Romantic stylization, in the form of subjective fantasy-shots (the flowery meadow, the circling cherubs) that are surely the worst moments in the film, banal, falsely naive and (if taken as representing the visions of 'simple countryfolk') condescending. The film can convincingly affirm the value of marriage, in fact, only when the marriage is in jeopardy, whether from internal threat (the husband's obsession with the City Woman) or external (the storm); it unwittingly supplies its own commentary on the idealization that is inextricable from its artistic intensity and distinction.

The city/country opposition is one of the major sources of confusion in the film. The opening caption informs us that 'wherever the sun rises and sets, in country or in city, life is

much the same . . .' while the film that follows seems dedicated to demonstrating the opposite. There is a vast, unexplained discrepancy between the vision of the city conjured up by the City Woman in the marshes and the life of the actual city the couple subsequently visit: the former (in keeping with the erotic connotations of the woman herself) is overwhelming and orgiastic, characterized by a stunning montage of superimpositions and rapid tracking-shots, and by the violently sexual movements of the jazz players; the latter could scarcely be accused of anything worse than triviality. Murnau makes some attempts to connect the two (imagery of whirling lights and wheels, the manicurist who strikingly resembles the City Woman), but the overall purpose of the city/country opposition becomes blurred. Doubtless the paradoxical relationship of the film to the audience it was made for contributes to this. Common sense tells us that an expensive Hollywood film made in 1928 was aimed primarily at an urban audience, and many details in the film confirm this: a lot of the jokes, such as the business with the Venus de Milo statuette in the photographer's, or the wife's response to the barber-shop manager's farewell ('And *you* must come and visit *us* sometime'), obviously presuppose a 'superior' sophistication in the spectator. The tone is not, however, consistently condescending. Throughout the serious and potentially tragic sections we are invited to relate to the characters very directly, as 'everyman' figures whose emotional states we can understand and share. At the same time, the film offers its city audience a general sense that country life is somehow better — truer, closer to nature, more authentic — than the city life (trivializing and hectic) which they are, of course, unlikely to forsake. The position the film defines for its spectator is not so much complex as bewildering: the characters represent ourselves, *but* we are superior to them, *but* they are better than us . . .

The central confusion, however, lies in the presentation of the City Woman herself. On the surface, she is the American Vamp (a figure that has, however, strong European affiliations: the City Woman bears some resemblance to the Louise Brooks of *Pandora's Box*, though without Brooks's innocence). Her clothes, hair-style, make-up, high-heeled shoes, inconsiderate behaviour (disturbing her landlady during dinner with a demand to have her shoes polished), all signify the type of the urban sophisticate of the jazz era. The imagery Murnau associates her with, however, pulls in quite another direction. Very insistently, she is a creature of the night: she appears in only one daytime shot and that is when she is driven away from the village at the end of the film, vanquished by the symbolic sunrise. She is also linked with animals. Sleek and dark, her appearance and movements are cat-like; she attracts the attention of her mate by whistling for him; subsequently, after the wrecking of the boat in the storm, she is shown crawling out along the branch of a tree overhanging the pathway. She is associated in several shots with the moon, and (since we are certainly forbidden to think here of chastity) the obvious connotations are of witchcraft. She leads the man into the marshes, and is thereby linked with images of fog, mud, darkness, with notions of sinking and contamination. She represents an unbridled eroticism quite unlike the trivial love-play we later see in the city; her wild dance in the marshes contrasts markedly with the ball-room dancing in which the Wife longs to participate. She is sexually overwhelming: at the climax of the love-scene in the swamp it is she who lies on top of the man, an image that — in the context of Hollywood conventions — carries strong overtones of the perverse, an implication emphasized by the earlier intercutting of the couple's guilty lovemaking with the

archetypal innocence of the deserted wife at home on the bed with the baby. We may recall that the term 'vamp' derives from 'vampire.'

The City Woman provides the strongest link in the film to *Nosferatu*, though once the connection is made the structural parallels between the two films become obvious: Nosferatu, also, was associated with night, animals and the erotic; he, too, posed a threat to the 'innocent' heterosexual couple; he, too, was vanquished by the rising sun. Like Nosferatu, the City Woman of the first part of the film becomes a figure of vaguely defined but irresistible power, before whom the male protagonist can only prostrate himself helplessly. Within the context of Expressionism, Murnau's films inflect the notion of Fate very differently from Lang's. For Lang, Fate is a complex mechanism that can be analysed; for Murnau, it is some terrible, implacable dark force. The helplessness of the hero is one of the most prominent recurrent motifs in the overall structure of Murnau's work. Its basis becomes clear if we look, by way of contrast, at the most striking exception — his last film, *Tabu*. There, the central recurring structure of Murnau's films is at once repeated and transformed. We find again the couple and the threat to the couple, but the couple are now completely eroticized and the threat — here clearly defined in social terms — is the embodiment of the Superego. Matahi is by far Murnau's most active hero, his unsuccessful struggle against the forces of repression giving the final half hour of *Tabu* a tragic urgency and active drive unique in Murnau's work. In *Sunrise* — as in *Nosferatu* before it — the destructive forces are those of the Id, and the film becomes itself an enactment of repression, through the process of idealization.

The ultimate — and ultimately distasteful — paradox of *Sunrise* is that this eloquent hymn to home, heterosexual marriage and family was the work of a homosexual. In making this point one is not laying a charge of hypocrisy, exactly, nor would one wish to place personal blame on Murnau. When the film was made there was no Gay Liberation Movement, and no gay consciousness, and the male homosexual's central drives were (if acted upon) punishable by law, a situation powerfully supported by the dominant social myths of homosexuality as vice or sickness or both. To be homosexual then was to feel oneself to be living in a barren desert gazing longingly at the unattainable mirage of home/marriage/family. And *Sunrise*, with its idealization and its artifice, has something of the nature — even the

appearance — of a mirage. Ostensibly a hymn to health (as societally conceived), it in fact testifies to the essential sickness of western culture.

An act of self-oppression never stops there: it always transforms itself into the oppression of others. In *Sunrise* evil is defined, not in terms of homosexuality (though that was doubtless for Murnau the root of it) but in terms of sexuality itself: the erotic is associated with darkness, fog, mud, 'sin,' and must be repressed in order that the idealized 'holy family' (the final image is eloquent about that) can be (re-)constructed. That construction further demands the subordination of women and their relegation to archetypal roles: the asexually 'pure' wife/mother who is finally sanctified, the sexually active 'evil' woman who must be eliminated from the narrative altogether. Behind the realization of this project is not just Murnau (though his presence lends it its wish-fulfilling intensity, its artistic distinction, and its ultimate perversity) but the whole tendency of western culture (European and American) towards repression and idealization (the two being, of course, aspects of the same process).

The film provides marvellous material for studying the process whereby ideology is universalized, idealized and naturalized. Universality is insisted upon from the beginning ('This Song of the Man and his Wife is of no place and every place . . .'); horse and dog (supported by the cultural myths they have accumulated) are enlisted as defenders of the nuclear family; the rushes gathered as an expedient in the plot to murder the wife become the means of saving her, showing how good is brought forth out of evil with nature as intermediary. Home, marriage and family (together with the repression and role-construction that support them) become emblematic of the law of nature and decree of God, cultural assumptions converted into universal and eternal Truth. It is a question whether the essentially simple ideological structure of *Sunrise* is supported by the massive elaboration of art or collapses under its weight. To whatever degree we may feel that its project is undermined by the film's discernible strains and confusions, *Sunrise* remains after more than sixty years a formidable statement of assumptions central to the development of our culture.

Note: This 'reappraisal' refers back to a more detailed article on *Sunrise* published in *Film Comment*, May-June 1976, although it can stand on its own, it is also offered as part-complement, part-critique of the earlier work, a more traditional (and far less critical) art-of-cinema reading of Murnau's film.

re:vue

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ERRATA

I want to correct a number of errors that crept into my article, "Towards a Canadian (Inter)national Cinema", *CineAction!16* and which readers must have found puzzling. I was out of Canada at the time; the article was handwritten and sent for typing; the publication deadline made it impossible for me to correct the typescript before the issue went to press. Obvious typos apart, these are the major errors:

Page 60, column 1, second paragraph: for 'climerical' read 'chimerical.'

Page 60, column 2, 4th line from top: for 'pressure' read 'preserve.'

Page 60, column 2, halfway down the page: for 'province' read 'promise.'

Page 61, column 3, 15 lines from the bottom: for 'necrophobia' read 'necrophilia' (!)

Page 63, column 2, 14th line from bottom: for 'ambiguous' read 'ambitious' (though 'ambiguous' is not out of place there).

Page 63, column 3, 13th line from bottom: for 'erosion' read 'evasion.'

Robin Wood

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See page 42



Entre Nous

